



The African child,
portrait of the
week by
Bahgory

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Weekly

Tragedy hits home

In every culture home signifies far more than a building, however elaborate or simple that building may be. On a very basic level being at home means being safe and secure — doubly so when that home is a sanctuary from the urban jungle into which megacities such as Cairo, with their hustle and bustle, pointed air and jammed, perpetually noisy, streets, have become.

When a modern apartment building collapsed on top of its residents and their visitors in Heliopolis this week — the third such tragedy in this same district in four years — obliterating entire families and producing the unbearable stories of horror that continue to surface from beneath the rubble of the Heliopolis building, this sense of home collapses along with it.

There is no denying the tragedy. The sense of horror and sorrow it evokes will be with us for some time but gradually, as always happens, it will be drowned out by city life, by the hustle and bustle from which "home" is our only sanctuary.

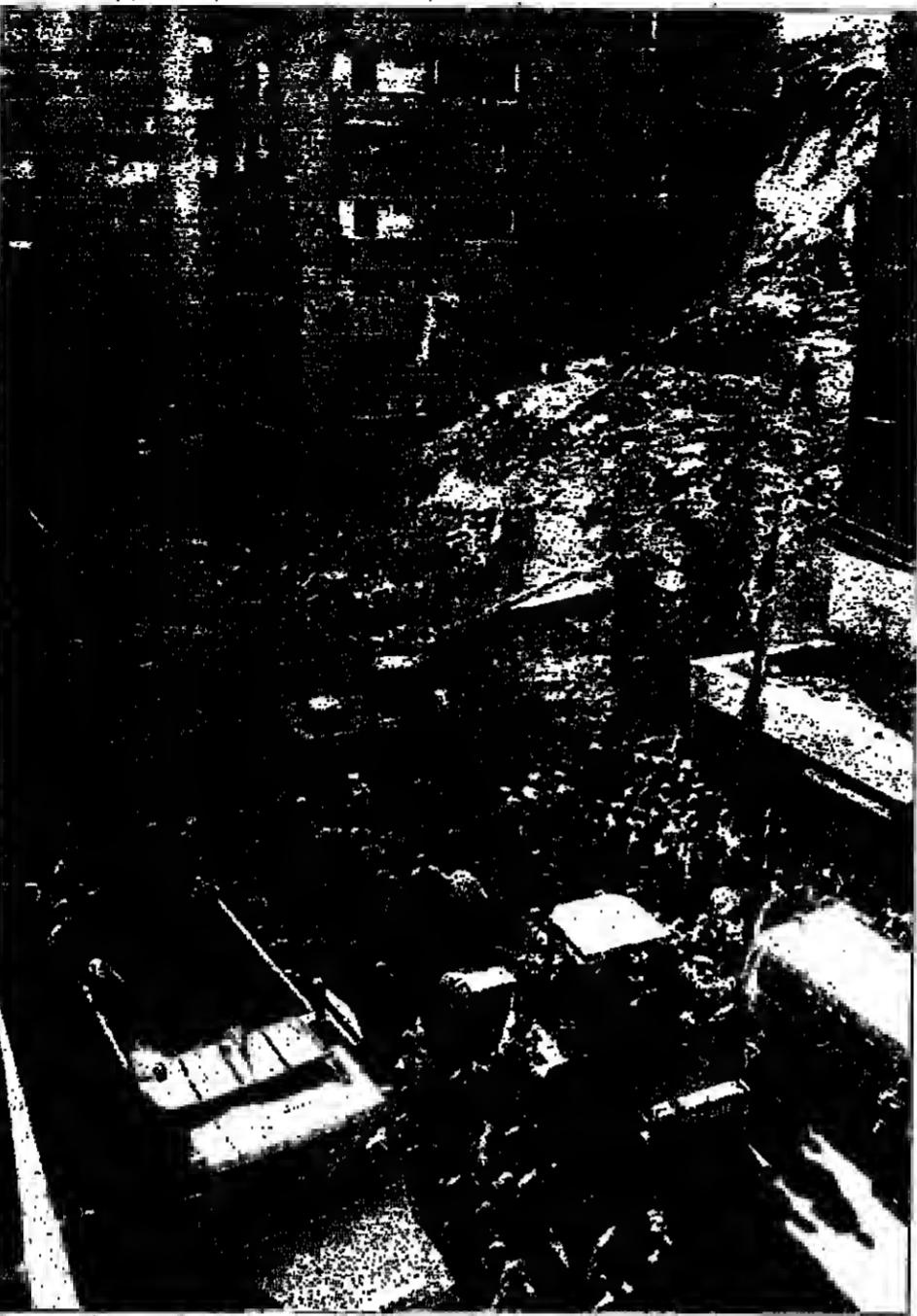
Nothing in the story of the Heliopolis disaster indicates that it was a one-off fluke. But while it is still too early to point accusing fingers, one thing is clear. We cannot blame fate.

We must, then, act quickly. Many questions await to be asked. To what extent does current legislation deter wide-scale abuses in construction practices? What guarantees are there that this legislation is enforced? And what of the legislation governing structural adjustments in owned, rather than leased, apartments, given that apartment ownership has replaced rentals in a great many buildings during the past two decades? Is there appropriate legislation limiting the right of apartment owners to make structural adjustments to their apartments? Do mechanisms to enforce such legislation exist?

What guarantees are in place to ensure that building violations — which threaten the lives of innocent families — are redressed within a specific period of time. What of the new Building Code passed by parliament last June, which stipulates that violations will be corrected within 15 days of a ruling?

The questions are many. One can only hope that they will be answered within the next few days, and answered decisively, so that the Egyptian home can become, once more, a place of sanctuary, and a fundamental human right will be guaranteed.

Hosny Guindy



An unknown number of victims still lie beneath the rubble of the collapsed building at 5 Abdallah Nour Street, Heliopolis, while anguished relatives maintain a constant vigil, hoping beyond hope that their loved ones will be found alive (see pp. 2 & 3)



Europe's role welcomed

BOTH King Hussein of Jordan and President Hosni Mubarak agreed that Europe had a role to play in the peace process, but it should not substitute or overshadow that of the US, reports Nevine Khalil from Sharm El-Sheikh.

Untimely demise

WITH GRIEF and sorrow, the Al-Ahram Organisation announces the untimely demise of its general manager of advertising, Adel Afifi, who passed away Tuesday night as a result of a heart attack. Afifi, 55, had returned on Monday from a business trip to Dubai and resumed work at his office in the newspaper. Death came after he returned home Tuesday night.

Prayers for the rest of his soul were offered at noon yesterday at the Omar Makram Mosque in Tahrir Square.

Afifi was born on 28 August 1941. He worked for the advertising department of Al-Ahram for the past 35 years, rising to become a member of the board of the organisation's directors in 1985 and general manager of advertising in 1986.

Afifi was also president of the Egyptian Advertising Association and the Egyptian chapter of the International Advertising Association.

Russian visit

RUSSIAN Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov arrived in Cairo yesterday in the course of a Middle East tour intended to boost the role of Moscow as a co-sponsor of the Arab-Israeli peace process. Foreign Minister Amr Moussa welcomed Primakov at Cairo airport and the Russian official later visited the headquarters of the newspaper *Al-Ahram* to deliver a lecture. In the evening, Primakov met with President Hosni Mubarak at the Sinaï resort of Sharm El-Sheikh.

After three hours of discussions, a business lunch and a drive through the Red Sea resort of Sharm El-Sheikh, Mubarak told reporters on Tuesday that Europe "has its own interests in the Middle East and its endeavours will bolster the American efforts." He added however, that the US role is "pivotal" and cannot be replaced by any other. "We cannot say that the European role will replace the US role," Mubarak said. "That is impossible."

King Hussein agreed, saying: "Europe has an important role to play because it's close to our region, [but] it is not seeking a role that would contradict that of the United States but one that would be complementary."

The two leaders met to try to find ways to bridge the gap between Israeli and Palestinian negotiators and review the faltering peace process. Egypt and Jordan are the only Arab countries which signed peace treaties with Israel, in 1979 and 1994 respectively. The Sharm El-Sheikh talks were also attended by Egypt's Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri, his Jordanian counterpart, Abdel-Karim El-Kababri, Mubarak's chief political adviser Osama El-Baz and

Egyptian Minister of Information Safwat El-Sherif.

Addressing a joint press conference, Mubarak explained that US Middle East envoy Dennis Ross left the region on Monday after failing to bring closer Israeli and Palestinian viewpoints. "Ross went back because he could not resolve the differences between the Israelis and Palestinians on schedule," Mubarak said.

Egyptian sources had told *Al-Ahram Weekly* during last month's Washington summit that the US wanted the two parties to reach agreement and begin implementation within 30

days of the summit.

"The gap may have been narrowed slightly," Mubarak went on, "but there still remain fundamental, sensitive issues [unresolved]." He advised the two sides not to try to exploit the current deadlock and to allow time for differences to be smoothed out. "The wheel of peace [began turning] 18 years ago, and nobody will be able to stop it from moving," he added.

Mubarak, however, would not outline a time frame for progress in the peace process. Asked by the Weekly how much more patient the Arabs should be in the face of the hard-line Is-

raeli policy, he said: "I can't give a fixed date, but let us try to help so that we can proceed forward." He added that Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu had assured him on several occasions that he will honour Israel's agreements with the Palestinians. "We would like to help him honour his commitments," Mubarak said.

King Hussein also remarked that Netanyahu had promised him and Mubarak a "surprise", presumably progress on the peace track, and hoped that "it comes soon."

Asked about Israel's muscle flexing and threats to wage war

against Syria, Mubarak said that "we must forget the word 'war' if we really want peace." He added that Israel must stop beating the drums of war, because "war is very dangerous."

Two days earlier, Mubarak met former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres to discuss the current stalemate in the peace process. Peres said that Israel's government was starting to realize that its hardline ideology would not achieve peace. "Only now are they beginning to understand that if you want peace for nothing, you have nothing," Peres said in Sharm El-Sheikh. (see p.4)

Backdoor hot pursuit

Clashes with Palestinians and the threat of war with Syria provide a grim backdrop for Israel's stalemated talks with the Palestinians. Tarek Hassan reports from Gaza

After Palestinians and Israelis resumed talks on Tuesday on a partial withdrawal from the West Bank town of Hebron, there was no sign that an agreement was within reach. In the absence of American mediator Dennis Ross, who returned to Washington, and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, who is on a European tour, differences persisted. The two sides blamed each other for the continuing deadlock.

Israel held Arafat personally responsible for delaying an agreement, charging the Palestinian president sought to make the maximum possible gains from mounting domestic, regional and international pressures on the Israeli government.

For their part, the Palestinians claim that the Likud government of Binyamin Netanyahu was attempting to alter the Hebron redeployment agreement previously reached with Labour's Shimon Peres.

"The Israeli government is simply required to implement this agreement instead of wasting time and making false allegations," said Ahmed Abdel-Rahman, secretary-general of the Palestinian cabinet.

According to El-Tayeb Abdel-Rehim, secretary-general of the Palestinian presidential office, the talkers snarled on Israel's demand that its troops have the right of "hot pursuit" in all of Hebron — home to about 100,000 Arabs and 400 Jewish settlers.

Although Israel officially had informed the Palestinians that it was dropping this demand, it has not, Abdel-Rehim said. The demand was put forward to the Palestinians again, but disguised to new terminology.

Israel now is claiming the right of uni-

versary intervention to deal with threats that may arise and cannot be handled by the Palestinian Authority. "This is rejected by us because what it means is hot pursuit," said Abdel-Rehim. He said the proposed new wording, which strips the Palestinian Authority of its powers, could be interpreted by Israel in various ways to suit its own interests.

Israel is lying and stalling, Abdel-Rehim said. The proof is that Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen), the top Palestinian negotiator, was held up for half an hour last Saturday at the Erez crossing point as he headed to a fresh round of talks at the Tel Aviv home of US ambassador Martin Indyk. Abbas was allowed to cross into Israel only on the express orders of chief-of-staff Amnon Shahak, Abdel-Rehim said.

"Who is stalling then? Amfist or Netanyahu?" he asked.

Hebron was again a flashpoint of violence on Tuesday as settlers shouting "Hebron is ours" shoved, cursed and spat at two PLO officials who toured the city, Reuters and The Associated Press reported. Israeli police escorted the two Palestinians away from the area.

About 1,500 right-wing protesters demonstrated in Jerusalem on Tuesday night outside the US consulate to voice opposition to the Hebron pullout, blasting US mediation efforts as a pressure tool on Israel. "We hope the government will stay strong and have the courage not to turn over parts of the city of our fathers to the hands of terrorists," said Dov Lior, rabbi of the Kiryat Arba settlement near Hebron.

"We are here today to help Bibi [Netanyahu] keep his promises in the people of Hebron," said Nadia Matar, 30, a settler (see p.5).

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Death by folly

Rescue workers, using giant cranes and hydraulic ladders, continued to search the rubble of a collapsed apartment building in Heliopolis for survivors. But as time passed, hopes were running low. Shaden Shehab visits the site of the disaster

At 6.25pm on Sunday, the thud of a loud explosion shook a section of the upmarket suburb of Heliopolis. The deafening noise was followed by columns of dust and smoke rising into the sky. Neighbours and passersby thought an earthquake was in progress.

People, many covered in blood, some in their pyjamas, ran out of 5 Abdallah Nour Street, behind the Heliopolis Club. The 13-storey apartment building had collapsed into a heap of masonry and twisted metal, trapping residents and visitors under the rubble.

By Wednesday morning, the Interior Ministry had confirmed that 28 people had been killed, 20 injured and at least 50 others were missing. At least 23 people were pulled out alive from the debris, but some of them died later in hospital. Many of the missing were feared dead, but rescue workers continued to sift the rubble, still hoping to find people alive.

Another elderly woman sat on the ground, slapping her face in mourning for a missing son. "This can't happen, get me my son back," she said repeatedly. Her other son tried to comfort her, but he himself was sobbing uncontrollably.

Safwat Said said that his brother worked for an electricity company housed in the building. "He needs a miracle to stay alive under all this rubble," he wept.

Safwat Said, who happened to be passing through the area, reported: "I heard a noise similar to an explosion, then the ground shook. I saw people run and then I could see nothing because of the heavy dust. I thought it was an earthquake."

lights powered by generators. A fleet of 150 ambulances stood by to assist the injured and transfer them to local hospitals.

"Nora, Nora, my daughter Nora," wailed an elderly woman dressed in black. "Do you believe that my daughter is buried under all this rubble? She is so young, she worked for a travel agency [inside the building]. What did she do to deserve this?"

Among the people pulled alive from the ruins were American women named Samantha Micksche and her Egyptian friend, Noha Mohamed Fawzi. They were found on Tuesday, 36 hours after the collapse, suffering from minor injuries. But Micksche's mother was still missing. The three were visiting the building at the time of the collapse to look at an apartment that belonged to Fawzi's uncle, which the Americans were considering renting.

"We heard a loud noise and I realised that a building had fallen down, but I thought it was another building," Fawzi said. She spent the next one and a half days "praying and reciting the Qur'an" and talking to Micksche. The two were trapped back-to-back.

Two men were saved on Monday after rescue workers heard voices crying for help. In order to reach them, the workers

"saw people coming out from the back of the building, some had blood covering parts of their bodies," said Mustafa Ezzat, a resident of a nearby building.

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had to blast a hole in a huge concrete slab in an adjacent building housing the Misr International Bank.

A third, Samir Abdallah, who owned the travel agency on the eighth floor, was saved, but was reported to be in a critical condition in hospital after losing both legs.

The missing include former Sudanese Information Minister Mohamed Mahegou and his wife, who are residents of the building. The wife and three children of Lutfi Moussa, a diplomat with the Saudi Arabian Embassy in Cairo, are also missing. Moussa happened to be outside the building when it fell. Also unaccounted for is Khadija Youssef Al-Torki, the sister of Ahmed Al-Torki, the Saudi Arabian under-secretary for communications. She also lived in the building.

Three of the dead were members of the same family — Jordanian businessman Wassim Al-Admani, 45, his wife, Wedgane Abd-el-Mullah, 40, and their son, Mohamed, a 20-year-old student. Wedgane Abd-el-Mullah was pulled out alive after being trapped under slabs of cement for

nearly 12 hours, but died in hospital. Another woman, who worked for the travel agency, was also pulled out alive after doctors amputated her left leg. She also died in hospital.

The bodies of a housewife, a travel agency employee, a retired professor and a plumber were found on Monday.

There were fears that visitors to the building, which housed two clinics, an x-ray centre, the travel agency and the electricity company, could also have been trapped.

Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri visited the site of the tragedy on Sunday evening. He told Egyptian television: "The most important thing now is to find the largest possible number of survivors. It is too early to tell the cause of the collapse. What we are working on is getting as many people as possible out alive."

A committee of professors of construction engineering has been established to determine the reasons for the collapse. Various theories circulated. The first is that the demolition of walls by construction engineers working on an apartment on the first floor had caused one of the pillars supporting the building to crack. The apartment, located at the front of the building, was recently bought by the Federation of Egyptian Banks, which planned to use it as an exchange room. This theory is corroborated by the fact that the rear part of the building suffered only a partial collapse. Three construction engineers, alleged to be responsible for the demolition of the walls, were taken into custody and charged with manslaughter.

Gen. Mousel Shafei, head of the army's Engineering Corps, who supervised the rescue work, told the Middle East News Agency that a preliminary investigation had indicated that some changes had been made to the columns supporting the building. "This building, which withstood two earthquakes, could not have collapsed unless one of the columns supporting it was tampered with," he said.

Accusing fingers were also pointed at Raouf Wissa Ibrahim, the building's owner. It is said that in 1975, six years after the apartment block was built, Ibrahim added five extra storeys, despite having authorisation to add only one floor.

It is also alleged that he ignored an order issued by municipal authorities in 1993 to make repairs to the building. Ibrahim has been remanded in custody and charged with manslaughter.

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Two separate volumes of the proposal (technical & cost) prepared in response to RFP issued 17 Oct 1996 are due at ARCE/EAP offices in Cairo at or before 1 p.m. Cairo time on Tues. 18 Feb 1997. Review and selection may take up to five (5) months. Approximately five (5) additional months are estimated for approval by govt authorities before the work can commence. Interested parties may obtain a RFP Package by contacting ARCE/EAP by written request, mail, fax or E-mail:

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After 36 hours entombed in darkness, rescue workers pulled Noha Ismail (above) and her American friend, Samantha Micksche



'Nora, Nora, my daughter Nora,' wailed an elderly woman (left). "Do you believe that my daughter is buried under all this rubble? She is so young... What did she do to deserve this?"

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photo: Saleh Ibrahim

Can it happen again?

"Those irresponsible, greedy criminals who waste the lives of innocent people to make extra money should be hanged." This is how Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfi reacted to the Heliopolis tragedy. His remarks, probably an emotional outburst, summed up the feelings of many Egyptians who have become tired of seeing laws made only to be broken...

And, as is customary following such a tragedy, there have been calls for tougher penalties for offenders, including one from El-Alfi himself. Although the reason for the collapse has not yet been determined, El-Alfi underlined the need to stiffen penalties for violators of construction laws. "The law should be enforced strictly and those who violate it, gambling with the lives of innocent people, should face the penalty of losing their freedom," he said. Fines, he added, are not an adequate deterrent because of the huge profits violators stand to make.

A new piece of legislation containing tougher penalties will be debated today [Thursday] at a meeting of provincial governors. El-Alfi said.

Housing Minister Mohamed Ibrahim Soikman said that the law dealing with construction licences will be amended to prohibit additions to already existing buildings. For example, if a licence was issued for a four-storey building, that building should remain at four storeys; a second licence would never be issued for the building of additional floors.

The new legislation will also include tougher penalties for those who violate their construction licences, Soikman said.

A 24-article Construction Law was passed by the People's Assembly in June, replacing a 1976 law. It provided tougher penalties for building irregularities, and also sought to simplify the bureaucratic procedure for obtaining a construction licence. Under the new law, violators could face a sentence of life imprisonment with hard labour if their offence resulted in the

death of one or more people. The law also gave provincial governors greater powers to curb building violations, both with regard to height restrictions — including the power to demolish violating storeys — and construction materials.

According to Talat Mustafa, deputy chairman of the Housing Committee of the People's Assembly, the collapse of the Heliopolis building does not mean that the new law is ineffective "but it does prove that the old law was highly inadequate and largely responsible for many construction offences."

Mahmoud Mahfouz, chairman of the Shura Council's Manpower and Services Committee, shared this view. The Heliopolis tragedy, he said, was clearly the result of the ineffective legislation of the 1970s. Although the 1976 law provided penalties ranging from five to 10 years in jail for the use of substandard construction materials, poor design or implementation of designs, and inadequate supervision of work, the earthquake of October 1992 revealed alarming examples of the use of substandard materials, even in expensive areas like Heliopolis, he said.

Mahfouz argued that the problem would not be solved by new laws. The construction of substandard buildings was the result of "the ineffective enforcement of existing legislation."

Housing expert Milad Hanna agreed that tougher penalties "will not solve the problem. They will only scare people away

from constructing buildings." What is needed, he said, is "to change some of the officials in charge to make room for other people who are creative and innovative."

Hanna, talking to *Al-Ahram Weekly*, described the collapse of the Heliopolis building as "shameful", especially as there are structures in this country that have survived for over a thousand years."

"It is a complicated and inter-related problem that stems from economic, social and bureaucratic factors," he said. Declaring that "we simply cannot go on like this," Hanna suggested that Prime Minister Ganzouri establish a committee to study the various aspects of the issue.

The problem began with the introduction of the economic open door policy, *infatih*, in the 1970s. "During the period of *infatih*, building owners wanted to build extra floors in order to sell them and make a hefty profit, instead of renting them out at low prices," Hanna said.

In the 1990s, another phenomenon emerged, with owners allocating the ground and first floors to businesses, such as banks and supermarkets. The space and decoration have to be changed accordingly and no licensing is required, Hanna noted. "In the process, walls, and even columns, could be damaged."

Sunday's tragedy was the third to hit Heliopolis in five years. As a result of the October 1992 earthquake, a 15-storey building on El-Hegaz Street collapsed like a pack of cards, killing 67 people. The owner of the building, Kamel Ali Awad, her husband and a partner were each sentenced to 10 years imprisonment.

On 28 January 1993, a six-storey building, also on El-Hegaz Street, came down, killing 20 people and injuring 22 others. The dead included the building's owner, Esraa Ali Mahmoud.

Reported by Gamal Essam El-Din, Shaden Shehab and Jallan Hawawi.



THE MISR Radiology Centre, located on the ground floor of the collapsed building, escaped unscathed. "All the patients who were in the centre at the time survived," Dr Mohamed Abu-Hoda Darwisch, one of the centre's four owners, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

Darwisch, who had been at the centre's other branch, arrived ten minutes after the collapse. "When I went to the site and found a huge hill of rubble, I assumed that the staff and patients had been killed. But then I discovered that a part of the building at the back had not collapsed. I found people coming

out of the centre. Only four of them were injured on their way out, and they are now in hospital."

The centre's two-million dollar's worth of equipment also survived. "The medical equipment is unscathed and could function normally. My only worry is that it will get ruined by the rescue work," said Darwisch. "Of course I'm not asking that the equipment take priority over people. But the centre is willing to take responsibility for transferring the equipment at any appropriate time."

The only culprits?

PROSECUTION officials have filed manslaughter charges against the owner of the collapsed building, Raouf Wissa Ibrahim, together with three construction engineers, and ordered that the men be remanded in custody for four days.

Ibrahim, who owns a car sales agency and lives in Zamalek, was also accused of making unauthorised additions to the building and unintentionally inflicting damage on the property of others.

According to the building's file, kept at the Heliopolis Housing Department, Ibrahim and his partner, Rifat Hassan Shehata, obtained a licence in 1969 to construct an eight-storey apartment building. In 1975, Ibrahim constructed five extra storeys, despite the fact that he had only obtained a licence for one extra floor. As a result, he was fined LE121,300 in 1976.

The file also reveals that Ibrahim was ordered by the Heliopolis Housing Department to make repairs to the building in 1993. The repairs were not made.

Under interrogation, Ibrahim denied that he had made unauthorised additions to the building, or that he had been instructed by the Housing Department to make repairs.

The three construction engineers also accused of manslaughter were named as: Ashraf Abd El-Nagari, Ahmed Mahmoud Riad and Ahmed Shehata Abd-el-Hamid. The three were employed by the Federation of Egyptian Banks to make alterations to an apartment recently bought by the federation, which planned to use it as an exchange room. The three were said to have been responsible for the demolition of walls in the apartment which could have caused one of the pillars supporting the building to crack.

A committee of professors of construction engineering has been set up to determine the reason for the building's collapse.

Brush with death

PALESTINIAN policeman Tawfiq Mohammed Hassan, who was slightly injured by the falling masonry, has cheated death for the third time, according to reports. Hassan, 26, was waiting inside an x-ray clinic in the building to undergo x-rays for bullet wounds suffered during last month's clashes between Israeli troops and Palestinian police in the Palestinian territories when the collapse occurred. He suffered only minor bruises.

Hassan was one of the first victims found by rescue workers, and reportedly led rescuers to other victims trapped beneath the rubble. He told reporters the last month's shooting and the collapse of the apartment building were not his only brushes with death.

In February 1994, he was wounded in the left arm when Jewish settler Baruch Goldstein sprayed Palestinian worshippers with automatic weapons fire in the West Bank town of Hebron, killing 29 Palestinians.

"I thank God for saving my life once more," he said. "Now, I will be able to see my two-week-old son again."

Rubble thieves

AS RESCUE workers searched the rubble for survivors, others were sifting through the debris for valuables. At least 10 men have been arrested at the site of the collapsed building for stealing money and objects such as gold jewellery belonging to residents. The 10 include a mechanic, an electrician and a carpenter. They all said they had arrived at the site to help rescue workers in the search for survivors, but were unable to resist pocketing the valuables they found scattered in the debris.

14 and with no one

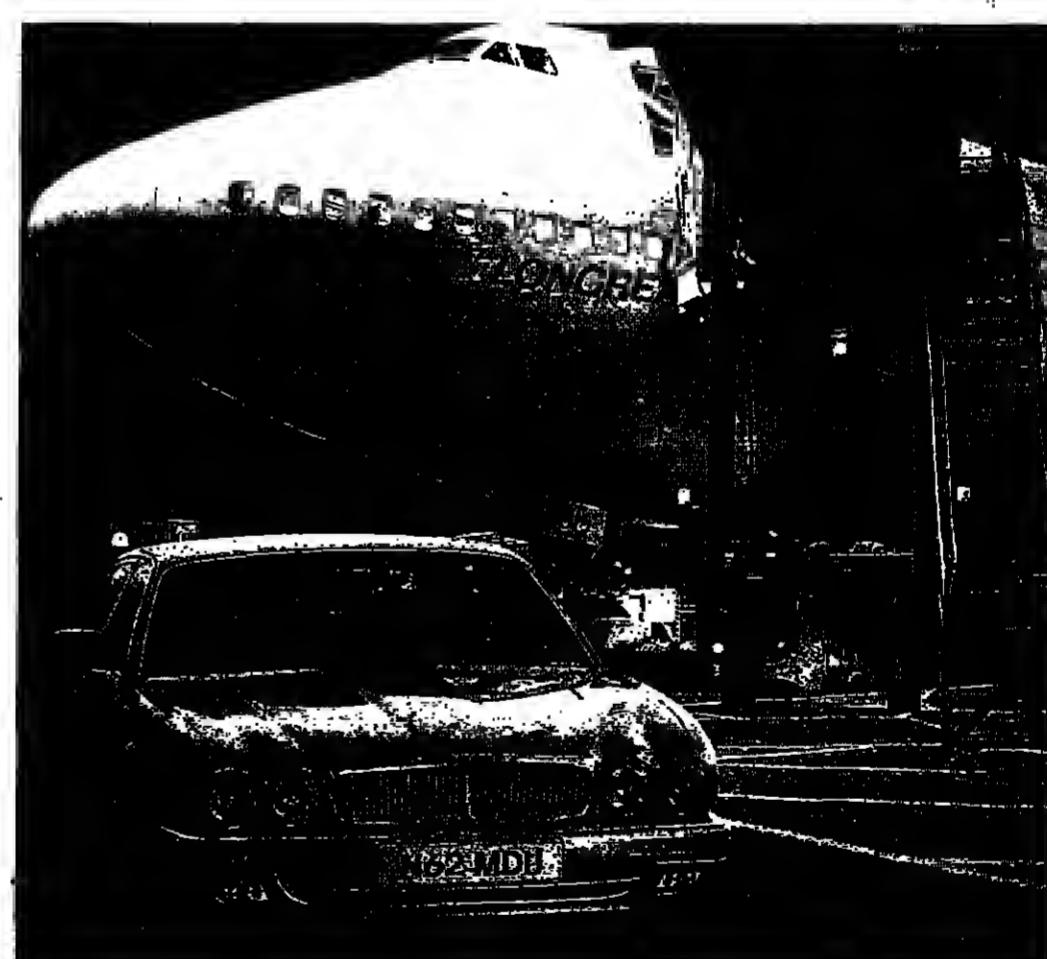
FOURTEEN year-old Hadi Makram went to take a private lesson at 5pm last Sunday. Naturally, he expected to finish the lesson and return home to join his parents, six-year-old brother and 17-year-old sister. But on his way back, he found the streets crammed with people, police cars and ambulances. He asked one of the pedestrians what was going on, and was told that an apartment building had collapsed. It did not occur to him that it was the building where he and his family lived until he got closer and saw the pile of rubble that had been his home.

For this teenager, whose other close relatives all live in the US, the situation is indeed tragic. He is currently staying with a neighbour in a nearby building, who found him at the scene. "I could not leave him in the streets. What would have become of him?" said the neighbour, Mohamed Es-saeed. "We've had calls from many officials expressing their concern, but we still don't know what Hadi's fate will be," added the wife.

For Hadi, all hope lies in the rescuers pulling his family out of the rubble — alive: "They will probably find them, at least my mother," he told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

Edited by Wadie Kirolos

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JAGUAR
EGYPT

FOLLOWING King
Hussein's arrival in Sharm Al-Sheikh on Tuesday, he was escorted by President Hosni Mubarak on a tour of the resort, which overlooks the Gulf of Aqaba. With Mubarak behind the wheel of the presidential limousine, the two leaders arrived at the InterContinental Hotel, where they had coffee and enjoyed the view. They shook hands with tourists and hotel guests and posed for photographers. At a news conference following their talks, Mubarak was asked about the nature of the discussion that took place in the car between him and the Jordanian monarch. "This is a secret which I am not prepared to divulge," Mubarak jokingly responded.



On the eve of a new session of parliament, Gamal Essam El-Din interviews Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kamal El-Shazli, and anticipates forthcoming debates

Agenda for reform



In the light of the cabinet's decisions, what are the main legislative measures that will be submitted to the People's Assembly in its new session?

It was clear from the first day that the new cabinet was formed under Dr Kamal El-Ganzouri that this government is committed turning the directives and aspirations of President Mubarak into reality, speedily and urgently, by means of a well-defined timetable of plans and programmes. Foremost is the creation of the appropriate climate for raising productivity rates to the target set by President Mubarak, which is a minimum of eight per cent return on national investments. With the private and mixed sectors shouldering the major part of the task of achieving this rate, the public sector's responsibility will be confined to implementing strategic projects.

There is no doubt that a number of executive tools and measures are necessary in order to create a better climate for raising the volume of investments and, consequently, production. Foremost among them are: achieving stability, whether in terms of security or legislation; protecting investments and providing investors with the adequate and necessary guarantees while fighting monopolies and dumping practices; combating red tape and corruption; continuing to consolidate the infrastructure; ensuring that land is available for agricultural reclamation and the establishment of industrial communities, and protecting agricultural land. I think these are some of the basic factors for achieving an investment and production boom in Egypt.

Although the new cabinet is only a few months old, I can say, with complete honesty and objectivity, that the cabinet has moved quickly and accomplished much through a series of executive decisions, made within the limitations set by the Con-

stitution. As for legislation, that is the responsibility of the People's Assembly.

The government has prepared several draft laws which it will submit to the People's Assembly once the new session opens. Topping the list is a unified investment bill, this bill, which was the subject of extensive study, is aimed at fusing the legislation governing investments in Egypt into one comprehensive and clear-cut law that maintains existing investment incentives, and provides for and regulates additional ones. Besides, there will be anti-trust and anti-dumping laws to maintain productivity rates and encourage competition with the aim of improving quality.

The government is also expected to submit another package of draft laws aimed at protecting bank cheque transactions, encouraging exports and boosting exports. These will include a unified law for civil servants, amending some articles of the criminal procedure law to speed up court hearings, and amending articles of some laws in line with Constitutional Court rulings.

Opposition parties have been sharply attacking the current People's Assembly after the Court of Cassation passed a series of rulings invalidating the parliamentary membership of some deputies.

Don't you agree that there is a pressing need for the Assembly to reach some sort of understanding with the Court of Cassation on what constitutes valid membership, or invalid membership for that matter?

I believe that the subject of the decisions taken by the Court of Cassation on election appeals [filed by losing candidates] has been addressed from various angles, with the legal experts failing to reach agreement. In constitutional terms, however, it is certain that the People's Assembly alone has the prerogative of deciding whether the membership of a certain MP is valid or not, and that reports issued by the Court of Cassation, and the conclusions contained therein, have worth within the bounds of the papers and documents submitted to it.

Obviously, we cannot predict the decision which the Assembly's legislative committee will take after it examines the court reports submitted to it. The committee's decision is referred afterwards to the Assembly, where majority has the final say.

The opposition claims that NDP deputies failed to exercise effective supervision of the government, especially in privatisation and the sale of public sector companies. How do you respond to this charge?

It is well known that the control exercised by the People's Assembly over the government's performance has different forms, ranging from requests for information, questions, interpellations [questions that cabinet ministers must answer], to requests for debating a certain issue — which should be signed by 20 members.

In filing requests for information or debate, submitting questions and interpellations, NDP deputies act independently. They are not subject to guardianship or manipulation but are guided only by their national conscience and the fact that the government is the government of the majority NDP, which implements the NDP's programme as endorsed by its members.

This applies to privatisation policies or any other policies contained in the government's policy statement, which it delivers at the beginning of each parliamentary session. All deputies, irrespective of their political backgrounds, have the right to discuss the policies, issues and priorities listed in this statement.

How do you evaluate the performance of the businessmen deputies in the last parliamentary session (1995-96) in view of charges by the leftist Tagammu Party

that they managed to impose business interests on the Assembly at the expense of the interests of workers and peasants? I think that after the adoption of the multi-party system, and in light of the Political Parties law, which regulates political party activity in this country, it cannot be said that there is a party that defends workers, another which defends peasants, and a third which defends businessmen. This is not acceptable any longer because projects depend on workers as much as they depend on businessmen. Capital is not enough to launch a project.

So it is not justified to assert that businessmen managed to impose their interests because national issues are integral — one texture — and so there can be no distinction between [the interests of] one citizen and another. On the contrary, I think that the businessmen enriched the Assembly with their views, derived from actual experience, which led to the removal of many obstacles in the way of investment and exports.

Municipal elections are scheduled for next spring. How is the NDP preparing for them?

The coming municipal elections will take a new form... They will be conducted according to the individual candidacy system instead of the state system. So, all parties, including the NDP, will do their best to nominate very popular candidates.

In the NDP, we have laid down specific requirements for our candidates: popularity, a good reputation, commitment to the party and devotion to work. Of course, NDP members of the dissolved municipal councils will be given a fair chance to run for re-election after their previous performance is evaluated. The NDP lists will also include young people and women.

Subscribers to Egypt's mobile telephone service will be able to use the hi-tech system as of Sunday — nine days before the opening of the Middle East/North Africa economic conference (MENA III) on 12 November. But the National Telecom Organisation (ARENTO) had a surprise in store for those who came forward to sign contracts in response to an advertisement in the Arabic-language press. A subscriber who has to pay LE2,000 in installation fees was also required to pay a three-months subscription — LE1,600 x 3 — in advance, plus LE100 insurance fee. Moreover, ARENTO said it would give priority in the "first stage" of the new service to those who had applied for car telephones between September 1993 and January 1995.

Ibrahim Magdi, a gynaecologist, withdrew his application when he realised just how much it would cost. "I didn't mind paying LE2,000 as initial fees, but why should I pay more? I don't understand why I must pay LE1,600 each month or why I have to pay in advance. I changed my mind after I realised that my telephone bill for the first year could amount to LE6,000," he said.

So far, 35,000 people have applied for a mobile phone, only around half of ARENTO's target. Nevertheless the new service has netted around LE70 million in revenue for the organisation.

In addition to the LE2,000 installation fee and the LE1,600 monthly subscription fee, a subscriber will be charged 60 piastres for every minute he uses the mobile — compared to 15 piastres for three minutes on the regular telephone. As if this was not enough, ARENTO's chairman Osman Lutfi announced that non-subscribers who call a mobile telephone user would be charged 60 piastres per minute, a fee which, some argue, could prove bad for business.

"The mobile may end up putting off a lot of people," said Ahmed Badran, a salesman with the Nile Engineering Projects Company. "Those who want to contact someone with a mobile will have to think twice before doing so."

Since the Ministry of Transport and Communications announced in June that it had signed a contract with the French Alcatel Company to install a 70,000-line mobile telephone network, critics have been highlighting the exorbitant cost of the new service. Officials from both the ministry and ARENTO had hoped to attract a full quota of 70,000 subscribers, who would bring in revenue of LE140 million. The fact that only half that number came forward could possibly be ascribed to "the high cost in relation to the average annual per capita income in this country, which is \$600," according to an Alcatel official, who requested anonymity. "On the other hand," he added, "ARENTO's monopoly on providing the service leaves the agents of mobile telephone companies with a very modest profit after tax."

According to Badran, the taxes begin with a 70 per cent import tariff, to which is added a 16 per cent sales tax and other duties amounting to 5 per cent. "This adds up to nearly 100 per cent of the original price," Badran said.

The price of mobiles available on the market in Egypt ranges between LE1,700 and LE4,000. However, in what appeared to be an effort to compromise, the Ministry of Transport and Communications decided last month to allow the private import of mobile telephones, provided they are compatible with the Global System Mobile (GSM). But this liberalisation did not amount to much in practice because ARENTO announced shortly afterwards that it would provide its services imported mobiles only if they were compatible with the brand names sold by the 15 telephone company agents in Egypt.

Defending ARENTO, chairman Lutfi said: "In order to cover the network's costs, amounting to LE65 million — which is only for the first stage — we had to guarantee an income of at least LE70 million. So where is the profit?"

ARENTO was aware of the frustration suffered by many people who found the cost of a mobile phone prohibitive, he added. "This will not last for long. We are just beginning; most countries which have this service went through the same experience."

Middle East watchers say that Egypt has lagged behind other countries in the region in introducing a mobile telephone service. And when the government finally made up its mind to go ahead, would-be subscribers were deterred by the high costs.

Costly calls

A mobile telephone service is to begin operation within days, but for many would-be subscribers, the charges have proved prohibitive. Amira Howeidy reports

'Iron lady' ordered back to Cairo

An Athens court has ordered the extradition of Hoda Abdel-Moneim, but the so-called 'iron lady' has appealed the decision. Sameh Abdallah in Athens and Mourid Sobhi in Cairo report

The Athens Appeals Court, acting on the request of the Egyptian government, has ordered the extradition of Hoda Abdel-Moneim — who fled Egypt 10 years ago after reportedly cheating dozens of people out of millions of pounds. Abdel-Moneim immediately filed an appeal against the decision.

The government's case against Abdel-Moneim rests on a three-year prison sentence passed against her by a misdemeanour court for issuing a bad cheque for \$50,000. Other sentences imposed by the Egyptian courts in absentia have now expired under the Egyptian statute of limitations, but the government wants her returned to serve the three-year sentence and face possible further prosecution.

While living in Egypt, Abdel-Moneim had run a land development company called Hedeco. She is said to have collected millions of pounds from would-be buyers as payment for apartments in buildings being constructed by her company. But instead of delivering the apartments to the buyers or re-imburasing them, she fled the country, allegedly with the help of a senior official.

After the Egyptian branch of Interpol filed a request for Abdel-Moneim's extradition, she was remanded in custody by an Athens

court for 20 days, later extended for another 20 days. During the court hearings, Abdel-Moneim claimed that she was a victim of mistaken identity, and that her real name was Safiya Mohamed Sallam. But the Athens court rejected this claim, and approved the extradition request.

Legal sources said her lawyers' move to contest the extradition was a formality, and would probably be rejected by the court. More important, the sources said, was the approval of the court's decision by the Greek minister of justice. However, while not under a legal obligation to endorse the ruling, it is not customary for the Greek minister to do so.

Abdel-Moneim's lawyers had contended that the three-year sentence, on which the Egyptian government has based its case, was no longer in effect because it was passed in absentia in 1993. Under Egyptian law, they argued, a sentence for a misdemeanour expires after three years if it was passed in absentia.

But representatives of the Egyptian government responded that the sentence had been passed in the presence of Abdel-Moneim's lawyers and did not, therefore, qualify as being passed in absentia. Consequently, under Egyptian law, it remains in effect for five — not three — years.



Edited by Wadie Kirolos

مكتبة من الأصل



The body of Helmi Shoushi, the 10-year-old Palestinian boy beaten to death by a Jewish settler, is carried to his grave by his family in the village of Husan in West Bank (photo AFP)

US turns a deaf ear

THREE UN humanitarian agencies issued a joint statement on Monday, decrying the situation in Iraq and calling for urgent contributions to the UN relief effort.

In a news conference in New York, the heads of the UN Humanitarian Affairs Department, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the UN Food Programme (WFP) expressed alarm at the dearth of critical supplies in Iraq, saying that only 4 percent of the funds they asked for had been donated by the international community.

Carol Bellamy, the director of UNICEF, told a news conference that 4,500 under five years of age were dying each month from hunger and disease. Catherine Bertini, director of the WFP, said: "The humanitarian situation throughout Iraq is dismal, and with the onset of winter, will become critical for tens of thousands of women and children and older Iraqis who already are living well below the poverty level."

The head of the UN's Humanitarian Affairs Department also said only France and the Netherlands have responded to the UN's 27 September call for funding to help Iraq until the oil-for-food deal comes into force.

In Washington, however, State Department spokeswoman Nicholas Burns, reacted coolly to the reports, saying that the United States has no way of evaluating "the degree of the crisis" in Iraq because it has no diplomats on the ground there. He laid the blame for the tragedy of the Iraqi people on Saddam's shoulders. "If he started taking some of his personal fortune and maybe spending it on his own population, then I think the Iraqi people would be better off," Burns said.

New ambassador

THE ISRAELI Foreign Ministry on Tuesday named a new ambassador to Egypt, filling an unexpired post which has been vacant for more than two months. Career diplomat Zvi Mazel, who heads the Africa desk at the ministry, was named as the replacement for the former ambassador, David Sultan, who had reportedly complained that he was largely boycotted in Cairo, reported Reuters.

Relations between Israel and Egypt which, in 1979, became the first Arab country to make peace with Israel, have been strained because of a lack of progress in the peace process since the election of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu last May.

European link

PALESTINIAN leader Yasser Arafat stressed during talks yesterday with Irish President Mary Robinson that international and European pressure was needed to push the Middle East peace process forward. He also thanked the European Union for its recent efforts to lead a helping hand.

Arafat is on a high-profile, four-day European tour including stops in Norway, Ireland and Spain.

The Spanish ambassador to Israel, Miguel Angel Moratinos, who was appointed on Monday as the EU's new Middle East envoy, told the Belgian daily *La Libre Belgique* that he hoped to build confidence between the parties involved in the peace process.

Qatari cabinet

QATAR'S Prime Minister, Sheikh Abdallah bin Khalifa Al-Thani, appointed a new cabinet yesterday, and concurrently retained the post of interior minister. Other members of his family also kept their previous portfolios in the ministries of defence, foreign affairs and finance, while the ministries of communications and transportation, education, culture, public health and Islamic affairs received a change in leadership, AFP reported.

Sheikh Hamad ibn Khalifa Al-Thani, the emir of Qatar, who approved the new government had, for the first time, separated the posts of head of state and head of government by appointing on Tuesday his half-brother, Sheikh Abdallah bin Khalifa Al-Thani as prime minister. The Qatari emir, however, held on to the position of defence minister in the new cabinet, and is also commander-in-chief of the armed forces. He also approves and passes laws and can call a meeting of the cabinet.

On 22 October, Sheikh Hamad, in an effort to put his house in order, appointed his third son, 18-year-old Jassim, as Qatar's crown prince.

Gaddafi in Tunis

LIBYAN leader Muammar Gaddafi, speaking to members of the Tunisian parliament on Tuesday, criticised Arab countries for failing to implement joint projects nearly 40 years after deciding an economic union in 1957. Gaddafi stated he was willing to welcome two to three million Tunisians to Libya provided they were ready to undertake useful jobs. He then ridiculed the US role in the Middle East peace process.

On a five-day official visit the Libyan leader arrived in Tunis on Monday overland from Libya because of the UN air embargo imposed on his country since 1992.

In a related development, French diplomatic sources played down the possibility of a rapid resolution of the diplomatic deadlock with Libya over the 1989 Downing of a UTA plane over Niger which killed 170 people. The Libyan ambassador to Paris had previously told a businesswoman's meeting that the UTA investigation was on the path to resolution after the French anti-terrorist judge concluded his investigations in July.

Keeping the temperature high

The break down of the Hebron negotiations this week has resulted in a stand-off between Netanyahu and Arafat. It is now a matter of which side blinks first, writes Graham Usher from Jerusalem

The clashes between Palestinian youths and Israeli soldiers in the West Bank village of Husan on Tuesday serve to remind just how incendiary is the "quiet" that has descended on the Occupied Territories since the intifada exploded between Israeli and Palestinian forces in late September.

The cause of this latest round was the funeral of Helmi Shoushi, an 11-year-old Palestinian from the village. Palestinian eyewitnesses say Shoushi was beaten to death on 27 October by an Israeli security guard from the Jewish settlement of Rosh Barak, near Hebron. The guard, Nahum Korman, allegedly entered the village after stones had been thrown at the settlement, grabbed Shoushi at random and then beat him with a rifle butt until he was unconscious. Masked Palestinians at Shoushi's funeral called for the "hanging of the criminal settlers". Israeli border police have rounded up Korman in custody.

Following the killings of two Palestinians in the West Bank last week — one of which, a roadside shooting of a Palestinian driver, suggestive of settler involvement — Palestinians suspect that acts like the Husan attack are ploys by settlers to "wreck the army's impending redeployment in Hebron". Palestinian frustration is compounded by the fact that the redeployment appears no closer now than it was in September.

Palestinian negotiators say that such an interpretation would enable the army to enter "Palestinian" Hebron (around 80 per cent of the entire city) at will rather than respond to an emergency. They insist that any Israeli re-entry into their area must be coordinated with the Palestinian Authority (PA) and via joint PA/Israeli patrols. "What else are the joint pa-

trols for?" says chief PLO negotiator Saeb Erekat. The result is a stand-off between Netanyahu and Arafat, and the resolution a matter of which side blinks first.

Yet Arafat is clearly playing hardball on Hebron. One reason is domestic. The PLO leader knows that his original interim agreement on Hebron is hardly popular among the city's 120,000 Palestinians (around 15,000 of whom will stay living in the 20 per cent of Hebron under Israel's military control). Further concessions to Israel's presence in the city are bound to be seen as a sop to the settlers and at the sole expense of Hebron's Palestinians.

But another reason is political. Arafat feels he can now hang tough with Likud on Hebron due to the formidable coalition of national and foreign forces he has marshalled in the aftermath of September's confrontations.

The most immediate fruit for the PLO leader since the confrontations has been his enhanced stature on the Palestinian street. Polls taken in recent weeks show that 61 per cent of Palestinians agree with his call to halt hostilities pending resolution of the Hebron negotiations. 51 per cent believe the confrontations strengthened his leadership and a colossal 85 per cent now "approve" of the PA's security forces, especially those who took up arms against the Israelis. This is some reversal from August when Palestinians took to the streets in Nablus and Tulkarm to demonstrate against Arafat's governance and his security forces often brutal execution of it.

Arafat has a long history of harvesting Palestinian unity out of politi-

cal crises. But, less typically, he has exploited the current crisis to sharpen divisions within Israeli society. In recent weeks, Arafat has met with Israel's President Ezer Weizman and Labour opposition leader Shimon Peres to "save the peace process" and, thereby, heighten the isolation of Netanyahu. Members of his Fatah movement were also invited to the Knesset on 16 October by Jewish/Arab Ha-Dash Party (leader of the far right Modem Party, Rehavam Ze'evi), was thrown out of the Knesset for shouting, "Murderers have come in!". The next day, a joint protest by Fatah and Israel's leftist Meretz bloc marched through Ramallah under the banner, "Let's make the peace process work".

These moves suggest a new maturity by Arafat and Fatah towards the schism within Israeli political society.

Israeli political commentator, Haim Baran, explains why such tactical alliances are vital to the Palestinian interest. "It is clear that the Palestinians are diplomatically better off with Likud," he says. "Most of Israel's social middle class (the natural constituency of Peres and Meretz) want Oslo to continue to secure better lives for themselves" and reject "the settlers' belligerency and Netanyahu's excesses".

Arafat's decision to hold out on Hebron for as long as possible thus works to aggravate Netanyahu's isolation and intra-Israeli dissension, both of which are in the Palestinian interest. But keeping the temperature high in the Occupied Territories is also a high risk gambit. And, as the Husan clashes show, it only takes one settler to start a fire.

France vows to be Lebanon's shield

Chirac's 21-hour state visit is not only symbolic of France's ongoing support of Lebanon but also aims to strengthen political and economic ties with Lebanon, Zeina Khodr writes from Beirut

It was his second official visit to Lebanon in less than six months and yet again French President Jacques Chirac was given a hero's welcome. Chirac's visit was part of a regional tour aimed at "instilling a greater European role in the Middle East peace process. It gained him many friends in the Arab world, especially after he called for the establishment of a Palestinian state and after he urged Israel to respect the principle of exchanging land for peace as the basis for negotiations.

He is also a hero in Lebanon's eyes because of his support for the country's reconstruction efforts and its bid to liberate the territories occupied by Israel in South Lebanon. Chirac vowed that France would not allow Lebanon to become the victim of regional settlements.

Arabs have been calling for increased European influence in the peace process to balance the pro-Israel stand of the United States. The EU is the main aid donor to the region and wants to have political influence as well. But in Beirut, French and European differences surfaced. During a press conference, Chirac slammed the European Union Commissioner Leon Brittan for criticising his drive for Europe to co-sponsor the peace process.

Responding to Brittan's statement that individual European countries should abstain from independent action, Chirac said: "Commissioners should not interfere in matters that are not theirs."

According to Emily Khoury, a col-

umnist in the daily *An-Nahar*, France needs the support of all European countries if it is to have political weight in the region. "France alone cannot coerce Israel to respect the principles agreed upon during the Madrid conference. It needs EU backing. The European countries can pressure Israel since they have economic agreements which could be jeopardised if the Jewish state does not consider Europe's position," she wrote.

While Washington is against the European Union and particularly France taking a role in the peace process beyond financial assistance, the American chargé d'affaires to Lebanon Ron Schleifer said: "While lots of people would like to think that there is a problem between the United States and its allies, differences do not detract from the fact that we work for the same aim which is a comprehensive peace."

Schleifer added that France's regional diplomacy is not conflicting with US policy in the region. But last April during Israel's 16-day onslaught against Lebanon, Washington and Paris crossed each other's paths. Both US Secretary of State Warren Christopher and his French counterpart Hervé de Charette undertook a shuttle mission to try to end Israel's Operation Grapes of Wrath. Both countries managed to be part of the April ceasefire understanding.

Foreign Minister Fares Bouez stressed the important role France played in the region during Israel's latest onslaught against Lebanon. France has the confidence and the support of the Arabs which was vital in reaching the understanding. Bouez described France's participation in the ceasefire monitoring group as crucial. "I think the credibility of the French participation is an important fact. France's participation in the monitoring group is an asset for Lebanon," he told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "The presence of the French representative in the group means that its decisions will be more balanced and just. This is why Lebanon lobbied very hard and backed the idea of France's participation."

The five-nation cease-fire monitoring group was set up after Israel's wide scale onslaught last April. It consists of military representatives from Lebanon, Syria, France, the United States and Israel and it is charged with looking into violations of the truce between Lebanon and Israel. Bouez added that the results of the group's two meetings were credible. "It took into consideration the source of the aggression, namely Israel. It was a fair decision and this is directly related to France's presence," he said.

But Chirac's diplomatic efforts are also part of a bid to reap economic benefits in the region and most notably in Lebanon where a multi-billion dollar reconstruction plan is underway. One of the fruits of Chirac's visit is a bilateral investment agreement to be signed in Paris next month. During Chirac's visit, French Trade Minister Yves Gallaud discussed trade and eco-

nomic relations with his Lebanese counterpart Yassine Jaber. The French official made the point that stayed in Lebanon during the war and that most of them are currently carrying out the reconstruction projects.

During his tour, Chirac tried to gain the support of the Middle Eastern leaders for his campaign to increase Europe's role in the US-sponsored peace talks. This plan was backed in Lebanon, as it had been in other Arab states. But France needs the support of its European partners as well as the United States and Israel. The latter it is not likely to get as the Jewish state considers Europe biased towards the Arabs.

Even Prime Minister Rafik Al-Hariri acknowledged the obstacles Chirac faces. "He is a close friend of mine. His second visit to the country shows the strong ties between Beirut and Paris. It also manifests France's backing at all levels. But EU involvement will not tilt the balance in our favour. It is a good sign but it is not enough to compete with America's hegemony in the region," he said.

But Chirac's diplomatic efforts are also part of a bid to reap economic benefits in the region and most notably in Lebanon where a multi-billion dollar reconstruction plan is underway. One of the fruits of Chirac's visit is a bilateral investment agreement to be signed in Paris next month. During Chirac's visit, French Trade Minister Yves Gallaud discussed trade and eco-

Europe's better option

By Mona Makram-Ebeid

"Europe is more than a geographical nation but it is less than an answer." This sentence by a renowned European professor of international relations summarises well Europe's ambivalent position at the end of the century in which it started out as a central player and the origin of two world wars.

With Mr Chirac's path-breaking and highly applauded visit to the Middle East in the background, an international seminar took place in Vienna entitled "The Euro-Arab Dimension: One Year after Barcelona," organised jointly by the Bruno Kreisky Forum for International Dialogue and the Arab Thought Forum. Arab and European participants tried over two days of intense debate to define Europe's role in world affairs, its potential and impact, as well as the several difficulties it is consequently facing.

During the debate on the European Union's role in a changing world, the European Union's ambivalences were underlined. Mr Chirac's visit, though highly appreciated and deemed to have a long-term impact on the region, was not seen as representative of EU policy. Germany, for example, had a different view and a word of caution was sounded on the concept of a single EU foreign policy. While it is true that the EU members are no longer completely independent states, they are still far from having one voice when it comes to foreign policy. Conflicts of interest on political and economic issues continue to exist. There is still no common denominator on which the future policy orientation of the continent could be based.

Most likely, there will never be. Additionally, Europe's own future holds several major uncertainties, among them the future of Central and Eastern Europe, as well as Russia, and these states' future relations with the European Union and the Atlantic Alliance. As for what is of interest to us, there is uncertainty about the future of the very heterogeneous Mediterranean area.

In all this fluidity, the European Union is the only legally established institution with a tremendous economic potential and a comprehensive political mission. Europe imports from 60 to 70 per cent of its energy from the southern rim of the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Its economic welfare is also dependent on the availability of cheap labour for menial jobs either in the EU itself or on its close periphery (e.g. labour intensive services, construction work, seasonal agriculture). Petro-dollars, although less important than in the 1970's, continue to nourish Western Europe's financial systems. The EU shares with the Maghreb, the Mashreq, Israel and Turkey the Mediterranean Sea and therefore is directly affected by environmental hazards originating in those areas.

Politically, rising extremism is at least as important a challenge to liberal democracies as economic mismanagement. The latter characterises Eastern Europe and Russia; the former, sometimes together with the latter, characterises Europe's southern periphery. This can result in acute crises that cause massive unwanted migration flows made up of economic and/or political refugees toward Europe. All these elements have over time, albeit in varying degrees, attracted the attention of the European Union. European economic interests are substantial in the region; its spectrum of interests much larger than we think.

Therefore, the question is, can Europe play the role of a protagonist of regional cooperation and integration? The answer is a definite yes. It has to implement its Mediterranean policy (decided upon in Barcelona last year) and reinforce its policy towards the Middle East. It can use the ad-hoc coalitions of states willing to play a greater role in contributing to the overall development of the southern states. What we are witnessing here is a growing flexibility of arrangements between a number of partners who are asking for more action from Brussels. They can help to organise a limited policy overriding the lack of full consensus on EU foreign policy. The potential is there; what is missing is the political will for prolonged efforts.

Since it can, should Europe play a more determinant role in the region, as Mr Chirac advocated? The answer is a definite yes, for several reasons, prominent among them the fact that the European Union, being the only legally established institution, is qualified to play the role of pacifier. On the other hand, after the break-up of the Soviet Union and the Balkans, there is an Islamic dimension that must be taken into consideration. There are 12 to 15 million Muslims who live in Europe, among them 4 million in France alone. The mechanisms to integrate these populations has ground to a halt and in France, Great Britain, and Germany, restrictive measures on immigration have crystallised these problems as well as the inability of Europe to adopt multiculturism. The result is that these communities are not considered European.

Finally, Europe has two options: Either it can go along with Huntington's theory of the "Clash of Civilizations" pitting against each other the Islamic and Western civilisations, doing much more damage than good. Or else, it can adopt a more positive attitude, in line with its values of tolerance and respect of human rights, to initiate a new effort at mutual understanding which will lead to peaceful co-existence on both shores of the Mediterranean. One should not forget that Europe is the only continent where Christians, Muslims and Jews live together in all or most of its states.

Ghali calls for anti-terrorism pact

UNITED Nations Secretary-General Boutros Ghali has called for a binding international agreement that would commit states to steps aimed at ending global terrorism. Boutros Ghali said in a speech at America's Harvard University that countries must work together to place international restraints on terrorists.

Ghali said the UN can help bring states together in the fight and provide a legal framework for anti-terrorist measures. He warned that terrorists have sophisticated international alliances, communications and funding. They receive arms and training from governments which they have accords with and, therefore, leave them alone, he added.

Ghali said he was reviewing international conventions relating to terrorism — the international convention against hostage-taking, for example, and the international convention against offences committed on board aircraft. He said he would present his findings to the General Assembly. He added that he hoped to expand international agreements against arms trafficking and fund-raising and other activities in support of terrorists.

In his address to the General Assembly last month, US President Bill Clinton also appealed for international cooperation to fight terrorism.

Meanwhile, at the UN, the chairman of the Organisation of African Unity repeated African support for Boutros Ghali's re-election, which the US opposes. The secretary-general's official term ends on 31 December.

Florida race riots

RACE RIOTS rocked St Petersburg, Florida, last week after a white police officer shot and killed a black motorist. Scores of extra police with loudhailers ordered African American youth off the streets. Black youth resisted and paced the street corner where the black motorist was slain. At least 20 people were injured and 30 buildings burned. Over 30 people were arrested. At the height of the violence, 300 to 500 officers were deployed in the area, including those from two neighbouring counties and the highway patrol, said St Petersburg police spokeswoman Lilia Davia.

The United States Justice Department sent a conflict resolution team and began a preliminary inquiry into the riot. St Petersburg Mayor David Fischer called on the US Civil Rights Commission to evaluate the city's race relations.

St Petersburg basked in the limelight two weeks ago when it hosted the vice-presidential debate. Last week, streets on fire and angry blacks throwing rocks and bottles Intifada-style grabbed the headlines. St Petersburg, a retirement haven on the west-coast of Florida, is home to 250,000 people. Roughly 20 per cent of its population are black and live in the impoverished South Side area.

Malta steers away from EU

MALTA'S opposition Labour Party, which vowed to keep the tiny Mediterranean island nation out of the European Union, won last weekend's general election. According to the final tally released on Monday, the Labour Party defeated the conservative Nationalist Party by 7,633 votes out of an electorate of nearly 275,000.

Owing Prime Minister Eddie Fenech Adami, whose right-wing Nationalist Party ended 16 years of Labour Party rule in 1987, conceded defeat and asked head of state Ugo Mifsud Bonnici to name a new head of government. The voting was, in effect, a referendum on the international aspirations of the island: joining the EU or pursuing an independent course under a party that once forged close ties with Libya.

Alfred Sant, the leader of the Labour Party, opposes the push for Malta to become part of the world's largest trading bloc. His strategy was to appeal to voters' patriotism and pocketbooks. Sant claimed EU membership would cost the country its traditional neutrality and national character, and promised to repeal an unpopular 15 per cent tax on consumer goods. He has not offered an alternative revenue-raising plan nor indicated if he would seek to re-establish the socialist "close made and military cooperation with Libya. Sant also wants to pull Malta out of the NATO-led Partnership for Peace framework. In the 1970s, Malta entered NATO to close its base and negotiated the removal of all British military facilities in the country.

Malta, a former British colony, has become Libya's lifeline to the outside world ever since the United Nations imposed an air travel ban in 1992 to force Libya to turn over two suspects in the 1988 bombing of a Pan-Am jetliner. Ferries carry travellers and goods the mere 230km between Malta and Libya.



A child victim of the bloody ethnic conflict in the border region between Burundi, Rwanda and Zaire. Thousands of people have been displaced as a result of the war (photo: AFP)

Blood always tells

In Central Africa, too many neo-colonial cooks spoil the region's delicately balanced tribal broth, warns Gamal Nkrumah

What's cooking? A bloody stew, if you ask me. The situation in the border region between Burundi, Rwanda and Zaire is worsening hour by hour and it is increasingly difficult to tell who is fighting who, a Red Cross statement warned this week. The ferocity of the fighting is reminiscent of the horrific events that occurred in 1964-65, when 500,000 Zaireans died, and in 1978, when Marxist-inspired groups under the umbrella of the Congolese National Movement took up arms against Zaire's central government. The groups confessed to being followers of nationalist leader Patrice Lumumba, who was brutally murdered by the lackeys of colonial forces in 1961.

The correlation between ethnic tensions between Francophones, Walloons and Flemish-speakers in Belgium, the former colonial master of Zaire, Rwanda and Burundi, and ethnic clashes in Belgium's former colonies is hard to miss. Zaire has some 200 ethnic groups speaking some 500 different languages. The sprawling African nation, a veritable political power-kid, has 450 political parties. Zaire has had a bloody history of secessionist rebellions beginning with the notorious Moise Tshombe's abortive independence bid for the mineral-rich Katanga — now renamed Shaba — provinces, which generates 80 per cent of the country's gross domestic product. Today's sad events might be the straw that finally breaks the Zairian camel's back.

What does one do with Africa's 1,500 tribes? Is there actually such a thing as a tribe in contemporary Africa? Ethnic groups are fragmented by class, creed and political affiliation. Yet tribesmen are bonded together by an arbitrary tag which actually has no place in reality. It is said that Africa cannot forge a purposeful consensus and that African tribal factions cannot overcome their rivalries.

The much maligned concept of nation-building in the 1960s was a winning formula. Today, there is no clear sense of citizenship in much of Africa. The Banyamulenge are ethnic Tutsi who, originally from Rwanda, moved to eastern Zaire 200 years ago. Hutu refugees, numbering some 1.2 million, who fled Rwanda and Burundi and took refuge in Zaire, resent the Banyamulenge and are trying to remove them from Uvira, South Kivu province, eastern Zaire. Today, the Banyamulenge are fighting the Zairian army and joining Zairian opposition forces. Zaire threatens to

withdraw their citizenship and expel them. Yet Zaire is only 36 years old.

A conversation that took place a couple of years ago springs to mind. [Rwanda's Defence Minister Paul] Kagame, the country's actual strongman, is a Tutsi you know. Blood always tells. You can tell by his regal bearing and his aquiline features," a fellow reporter told me as the Kenya Airways plane we had boarded an hour earlier in Nairobi was grounded on the tarmac at Kigali's international airport on the outskirts of the Rwandan capital because of a technical fault.

Europeans — mainly Belgian, German and French — leaving the war-torn country filed past carrying a few personal belongings. "They are fleeing this bleeding land," he said, shaking his head. "The ethnic Tutsi are Africa's Jews." Reason didn't exactly mask the derision in his tone. "Are the Tutsi Africa's Jews or its Nazis? Perhaps, they are Africa's Zionists," I ventured. The governments of both Rwanda and Burundi are dominated by the mainly Tutsi military establishment in the two countries. Today, the Tutsi control Rwanda and Burundi and might soon overturn eastern Zaire. They have a close working relationship and blood ties with Uganda's rulers. They control the sources of Africa's two longest rivers — the Nile and the Congo. They are a force to be reckoned with. The fate of the continent lies in their hands.

As preparations for the millennium become more frenzied, we are reminded that ethnic conflict is gaining currency among disparate African nations. Tribalism in Africa is portrayed as if it is a reason for the continent's backwardness when it is the manifestation of a continent in transition. Africa is exercising its inner demons, voodoo-style, in a last-ditch attempt to deal with deteriorating social conditions. That's the way the cookie crumbles on the continent.

Paul Kagame is no smooth talker; he is a rough fighter. Rwanda's President Pasteur Bizimungu is a very different man. He is a model of civility. He is an ethnic Hutu who heads a predominantly Hutu government that champions the rights of the ethnic Tutsi — half a million of whom were slaughtered by Hutu chauvinists in 1994. In an interview with Bizimungu last year, I was struck by the impartiality of his public persona, which was instrumental in uniting his war-torn nation under a multi-ethnic coalition government. The disparity between Bi-

zimungu and Kagame is bewildering.

The ghoulish fascination of the international media with the brutality of ethnic conflicts on the continent is also perplexing. Terror found its way to the small screen last week. The scenes on television are full of clichés of primeval terror such as wild, hungry and angry eyes; perhaps, even ritual slaughter and the washing of spears in blood. Violence is riding roughshod over national boundaries. The African nation state is itself bedevilled by the quest for legitimacy. The people live in anguish.

Bloody score-settling wars are rife. In Rwanda's genocidal civil war of 1994, Hutu extremists backed by Zaire massacred over 500,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutu before the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front seized power in Rwanda. The scale of the exodus of Hutu refugees is frightening. The National Council for the Defence of Democracy (CNDD), the main Hutu Burundian refugee organisation, is unable to cope. United Nations attempts to organise a 20-day emergency food airlift into the area have been foiled because of the violence. The CNDD and other Hutu organisations want to destabilise Rwanda and Burundi, the Rwandan Patriotic Front warned. The office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in Nairobi put the number of displaced persons at over 500,000.

The London-based International Institute of Strategic Studies has dismissed the Zairian army's fighting capabilities. The institute said in a statement issued this week that the Zairian army is ill-equipped and unable to patrol and secure the country's borders. The Banyamulenge's People's Democratic Alliance has allied itself with three Zairian leftist forces: the Popular Revolution Party, the Revolutionary Movement for the Liberation of the Congo and the National Resistance Council for Democracy. According to the institute, the People's Democratic Alliance has some 50,000 fighting men.

Democracy is not necessarily the harbinger of peace and political stability. Burundi's 1993 elections were widely acclaimed as a model of democratic transition. A couple of months ago, the Tutsi-dominated Burundian military usurped power, ousting the democratically elected civilian administration. External actors were not irrelevant. Rwanda and Uganda had a hand in the coup, making it all the more unnerving to Zaire and Kenya — the two main sympathisers of Hutu extremists. France, too, was unhappy. Hutu leaders who mas-

terminded the Tutsi massacres in Rwanda are hunted down. Colonel Theoneste Nizinde and entrepreneur Augustin Bugirimfura were murdered in Nairobi recently. The Rally for the Return of the Refugees and Democracy in Rwanda, a Hutu organisation, bitterly protested. Last week, European Union special envoy Aldo Ajello travelled to the Great Lakes region of Africa to take the issue up with Rwanda's and Burundi's leaders.

Zaire has registered a formal protest with the UN Security Council, accusing Rwanda and Burundi of infringing upon its territorial integrity. The country is in danger of disintegration. Secessionist activities in the snow-capped mountains of eastern Zaire are just the tip of the iceberg. Zairian President Mobutu Sese Seko is in Switzerland recuperating after an operation for prostate cancer. His violent anti-communist crusade elicited the approval of Western powers, who turned a blind eye to the kleptocratic culture that took Zaire by storm.

Analyses of African calamities are invariably premised on the argument that Africans cannot rule themselves. Are democracy and development projects that Africa cannot undertake without outside help? "Peace can only return to the region through negotiation — in the framework of an international conference," said French Cooperation Minister Jacques Godfrain. German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel recalled Germany's ambassadors in Kinshasa, Kigali and Bujumbura, telling reporters in Bonn that Germany was doing "all that can be done to ease this dangerous situation." America's permanent representative to the UN, Madeleine Albright, is pressing for an international conference to stop the killing. For once, UN Secretary-General Boutros Ghali agrees with her. The two want serious preparations before they go ahead with convening the conference.

Africans are clutching at straws. The Maastricht conference of the Global Coalition for Africa in November 1995 was followed this week by a conference in the Burkina Faso capital Ouagadougou. The coalition is a consortium of American, European and Japanese politicians and businessmen and multinational conglomerates with interests in Africa. Again Africa was condemned to democracy. In some quarters, that appears as a life sentence of sorts. Donors pushed for tight conditions for the setting of key policy instruments. Again Africa is forced to make bricks without straw.

The lesson of Dearborn

James Zogby draws a moral from the story of a city in Michigan, where Arab Americans organised themselves politically

In 1985 Mike Guido first ran for mayor of Dearborn, Michigan, a city of 100,000 people, 20,000 of whom are Arab. As part of his campaign, Guido mailed to every home in Dearborn a pamphlet entitled "Let's talk about the Arab problem." In the pamphlet Guido depicted the large number of Arabs who were moving into Dearborn. He described them as threatening "our neighbourhoods, the value of our property and our darned good way of life." Using scare tactics about Arabs was Guido's way of winning votes.

I went to Dearborn in the midst of that crisis to do work with the community. Our analysis was simple: Arab Americans in Dearborn were vulnerable to attack because they were weak and unorganised. With only 1,100 registered voters, they were easy prey. I said then that, with our community comprising 20 per cent of the population of Dearborn, we were not the "problem" of Dearborn, but "the promise of its future." It was our responsibility to transform ourselves into that promise. During the next 10 years we registered voters and mobilised community participation in politics. Today, thousands more Arab Americans are voters, hold public office and form a strong bloc in both the Democratic and Republican parties in Dearborn and Michigan, and are among that city and state's most respected citizens.

So it was no surprise that when the Arab-American Institute held its annual national leadership conference in Dearborn on 20-21 October 1996 — the first such conference outside of Washington — Mayor Mike Guido came to our banquet to deliver a warm welcome to his Arab-

American friends. What has happened in the intervening 10 years? The Arab American community has grown in stature and the mayor, quite simply, can count votes. It has become important in Michigan to take the Arab American voters seriously.

Guido's appearance was but an example of the new Arab American role in politics in evidence at the conference. The conference, "Decision '96: The Arab American Vote," was designed to focus attention on the importance of Arab Americans in both Michigan and Ohio. A statewide political rally had been held in Cleveland, Ohio, the night before the Dearborn conference. Both states are home to large Arab American communities.

Participating in the two-day Dearborn event were the state's Republican governor, John Engler, both its senators, Republican Spencer Abraham (an Arab-American) and Democrat Carl Levin (a Jewish American whose re-election campaign has been endorsed by most in the Arab American community), a number of members of the House of Representatives (most notably our own Nick Rahall), candidates for a wide range of elective offices, leading officials in both political parties and national leaders from both the White House and the Dole campaign.

Before the conference actually began, a meeting of Palestinian American leaders was held in a nearby hotel to publicly endorse President Bill Clinton. Campaign officials on hand to receive the endorsement thanked the Palestinian leaders and pledged that the president would continue to back the Israeli-Palestinian peace accords. The

next day's newspapers featured a bold headline: "Palestinian leaders turn to Democrats — Clinton gets backing in Dearborn." In another endorsement announcement, a group of Lebanese American businessmen presented the Clinton campaign with their backing for the president's re-election. It, too, was received with appreciation.

Both cases were a far cry from 1988 when the Democratic presidential nominee, Michael Dukakis, actually rejected Arab American endorsement. In 1984 when the Democratic nominee, Walter Mondale, returned donations from some Arab American contributors. Once again, a clear example of the progress being made by Arab Americans in the political mainstream.

The policy discussions at the Arab American Institute conference were equally noteworthy. While significant attention was given to the issues of Palestine, Lebanon and US-Arab relations, there was substantial discussion about a number of domestic policy concerns. So intense was the discussion on immigrant rights that one observer commented, "When we couldn't get Arab Americans to discuss domestic issues at our conferences, all they wanted to talk about was the Middle East. Now we can't get people to focus on the Middle East." But that, too, was a sign of progress.

Arab Americans have definite concerns about Middle East issues and, as recent poll shows, there is a deep community consensus in support of the peace process, Palestinian statehood and Lebanon's sovereignty. What is new is that Arab Americans today have become articulate defenders of their domestic policy concerns, while

their community leaders are often to be found in the forefront of the national debate on these questions. This represents growth and maturity and political sophistication.

What the Michigan conference made clear is that Arab Americans have crossed the threshold into the US political mainstream. Arab Americans who have laboured for years trying to get inside, must now shake off old complexes and recognise new responsibilities and opportunities. This does not mean that there are no problems plaguing Arab Americans — in a democracy every group must continue to remain vigilant, to defend its rights and to insist on fairness. We Arab Americans still have powerful foes who seek to weaken us and exclude us, but we also now have powerful allies who will defend us and whom we must now also support.

The lesson we have learned is that complaining and protesting, while useful in some instances are limited in effectiveness. Organising oneself and registering to vote and mobilising that vote, on the other hand, can produce real victories. They can break down barriers and build a community's stature. What we must do now is continue to intensify our effort on this path and build on the experience of Dearborn's Arab Americans.

What the past decade has taught us is that political respect is hard won. It requires dedicated and committed community activists and a focus on electoral politics. On this path we not only earn the recognition we deserve, but we achieve the access that will advance our community's concerns as well.

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Council call: come and get it

Among the several items on the agenda of last July's meeting of the Presidents' Council in Washington with President Hosni Mubarak and US Vice-President Al Gore, was the presentation of projects at the third Middle East/North African economic conference (MENA III). Over the following three months, council members worked in earnest to put together a package which would highlight the strides taken to reform Egypt's economy and to introduce new forms of cooperation in line with the growing trend for an integrated global economy. As a result, 13 well-documented, fairly large scale projects were produced by the council's New Business Opportunities Task Force.

A set of tough criteria, including a minimum of \$10 million in capital and incentives for investors, were set as a prerequisite for participation. Egyptians and Americans worked together to prepare the projects, and some disagreements emerged, revolving around whether the projects were big enough for the 12-14 November conference in Cairo.

"I think we have a very good package," said Ibrahim Hussein, secretary-general of the Presidents' Council. Hussein believes that the MENA III in Cairo will be more business oriented than the previous two MENA conferences, which were held in Casablanca and Amman, even though "chanc-

The Presidents' Council will present 13 high-profile projects at MENA III. Nevine Khalil takes a close look at their preparations

es for tremendous success have been dampened" because of the current tension surrounding the peace process.

The intransigent policies adopted by the new right-wing government in Israel, headed by Binyamin Netanyahu, dampened hopes for a frank and productive business conference, to such an extent, that Cairo appeared to be contemplating cancelling or postponing the conference. For its own part, the Presidents' Council was divided over what would be more beneficial for Egypt — holding the conference on time or not. "Keeping Egypt's interest in mind, the council decided that politics will take second seat to economic concerns," said Hussein. President Mubarak, he added, was "a very good listener" to the council's opinion, which focused on "Egypt first".

To a certain degree, the apprehension stemming from the political turmoil has been circumvented, in part because of MENA III's significance to Egypt. When Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri took office in January, recalled Hussein, he stressed his desire that the conference be "a celebration of Egypt's achievements and economic reforms". Since then, the government, with input from the coun-

cil, worked to reform its economic policy and the pertinent legislation. Hussein said that progress on the part of both the Egyptian and American members of the council has been "impressive".

The business community now realises that the government's role during MENA III will be, said Hussein, "to assist, promote and encourage Egyptian businesses to make contacts at the conference." The Presidents' Council will present two types of projects during MENA III: three finalised projects to showcase Egypt's economic progress which need an occasion for ceremonial signing, and another 10 which are still looking for investors.

Showcase projects include the aluminium foil and packaging project, which is an example of the numerous joint-venture opportunities available in Egypt, both with the public and private sectors. The project aims to use semi-finished aluminium products by Misr Aluminium Smelter to produce more valuable downstream products.

A second project ready to be signed is the Locomotive Manufacture Project, where Egypt's state-owned rail manufacturer will establish a private-sector joint-venture enterprise for the man-

ufacture of locomotives domestically. SEMAF, a public-sector company manufacturing rail vehicles, will own about 25 per cent of the equity in a company to be controlled by the US electronics and defence contracting giant, General Electric. The fruit of the project, which combines technology transfer, privatisation and enhanced manufacturing capabilities, will appear on the local market by 1998 and, within one or two decades, exporting to neighbouring countries is expected to begin.

An environmentally-friendly showcase project is the Nile River Clean-up Project, where an American manufacturer will licence the transfer of necessary technology for the eradication of river hyacinth, a weed which has long been a thorn in the Ministry of Irrigation's side. Under this project, El-Elec International will license Egypt's state-owned TERSANA to locally assemble dredges used to remove the hyacinth clogging the Nile and irrigation canals. The project will also enhance TERSANA's chances as a candidate for privatisation.

As an example of the government's close working relationship with the private sector, the council will profile two companies offered for privatisation in coordination

with the Ministry of Public Sector. The first, the Nasr Glass Company, Egypt's leading glass and crystal manufacturer, will be transformed into an Egyptian shareholding company, and new investment should help this local market leader move into the export market.

The second company ready to be taken by shareholders is the Porcelain Dinner and Utility Ware Company, a major factory producing porcelain, sanitary ware and tiles. The company is currently looking for a new owner willing to cover its LE16.2 million price tag.

Other council projects of interest include a flower export scheme, which will take advantage of Egypt's agricultural potential, labour and water resources, as well as Israel's proven technology and markets for cut flowers. This Egyptian-Israeli project will be run by a joint stock company established under Egyptian law, and will target the \$1 billion European flower market.

"About a year ago, Israeli businessmen told the Egyptians they export \$600 million in flowers, but now there is no more land and labour is too expensive," Hussein recalled. "They proposed a joint-venture which has tremendous potential."

Also in the works is a S\$5.1 million joint-venture in agriculture,

the plant to the EEA. Also in the field of energy is a mega-project for a Gulf of Suez petrochemical facility, which will be realised at an estimated cost of \$1.5 billion. Egypt's Ministry of Petroleum is planning to install a large petrochemical manufacturing complex and seeks as its partner a major multinational in the same field.

The council also offers two projects within the framework of Egypt's Technology Development Programme, which is concerned with supporting private-sector high-technology industries. The first project in this area is for \$30 million high-tech business incubators. The second is a water processing foundry, the cost of which is estimated at \$315 million. This project will be instrumental in boosting the microelectronics industry in Egypt.

In the sector of tourism, the council will offer a project which makes use of Egypt's tourism potential, especially in coastal resorts such as the Red Sea resort of Sharm El-Sheikh. The complex in Sharm El-Sheikh will cover an area of 1,000 acres, with sea-front development stretching out for four kilometres, and will cost \$63.9 million.

"We need to show we are more than talk," Hussein said. "The message to the outside world is come and get it, with the early bird getting the most."

The road from Casablanca

Mona Qassem, reviewing previous Middle East economic conferences and their outcomes, argues that to date, it is Israel which has gained the most

The idea of organising an economic conference between the parties involved in the Middle East peace process dates back to 1993, when Shimon Peres, Israel's prime minister at the time, published a book entitled *The New Middle East*.

In the book, Peres discussed a new vision of the regional order, one in which the spectrum of cooperation would include economic and security issues, as well as water, tourism and refugees.

For Israel, the objectives of conferences such as MENA III were clearly laid out during the 1994 Casablanca summit. Israel, it became clear, wanted to convince Arab and foreign investors to channel their capital into the Middle East. The primary focus of this drive was to attract Arab investments, preferably in the form of joint projects. With this aim in mind, Israel found it necessary to work to normalise economic and cultural relations with the Arab countries while simultaneously reinforcing its concept of Israeli 'security' and 'sophistry'.

Egypt's objectives during the Casablanca conference, however, were to focus on a comprehensive and peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. From the Egyptian perspective, this meant that regional cooperation could not be got off the ground without a full and just peace between Israel and its Arab neighbours.

Among the recommendations presented at the Casablanca conference were the establishment of the Middle East Regional Development Bank and the Middle East Travel and Tourism Association (MENTTA), both of which are currently under way. Another recommendation was for the establishment of a regional chamber of commerce and a re-

gional business council. The latter, however, has encountered some obstacles that have impeded its formation. A fourth recommendation was to reinforce the principles of partnership and cooperation between the private sector and the governments of the region. The most significant outcome of the conference was the acknowledgement of the new regional role Israel would be expected to play in the Arab world.

The next economic conference, which was held in Amman in 1995, witnessed several crises. Prior to it the Syrian poet Nizar Qabbani published a poem entitled, "The Scouring Ones", in which he criticised those Arabs who hastened to make generous offers and propose economic agreements with Israel before any resolution was reached on the Palestinian Occupied Territories, the Golan and South Lebanon. He was, in effect, arguing that the economic pressure which could have been used as leverage to force Israel to withdraw from the Golan and South Lebanon, vanished into thin air thanks to the Arabs themselves.

On this issue, Egypt advised caution — the belief being that speeding up economic normalisation was not desirable, at least until the question of Israel's occupation of Arab territories was resolved. Jordan, on the other hand, favoured securing the maximum possible economic gain out of the peace it had recently signed with Israel.

Ironically, while Jordan's King Hussein was commenting that Egypt was the first Arab country to rush into peace with Israel, he was ignoring that Jordan had turned a blind eye to the late Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's pre-Amman conference declaration that Jerusalem was the eternal

and undivided capital of Israel. The US supported this declaration, and the Congress approved the transfer of the US Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem no later than 1999.

Although this policy was in flagrant violation of Security Council resolutions which declare that Jerusalem is part of the occupied Arab territories, the US and Israel embraced their stance wholeheartedly, fully confident that any Arab reaction would be futile.

This tension was evident during the Amman conference, which ultimately served to reflect the discord in the positions of the various Arab nations. Some countries, such as Jordan and a few of the Gulf states, adopted the view that the time was right to cast in the economic gains to be had, as a way of recouping some of the losses from war and foreign occupation. Others, however, remained steadfast in their conviction that economic cooperation should complement the peace process, and not be used to pressure any Arab state to yield to arbitrary Israeli demands.

But political turmoil aside, several projects grew out of the Amman conference, such projects included one for the "Red Sea Riviera", near Ras Banas which brought together Egypt, Israel and Jordan, and a free-zone project on the Egyptian-Israeli border. But, most of these projects were more beneficial to Israel than to its Arab partners.

Projects whose outcome would promote the development of Arab economies, such as Egypt's proposed agricultural projects, Palestinian infrastructural projects and Jordanian Dead Sea mineral projects, however, had not made headway.

The disappointing results of these projects were underscored by the fact that Amman's sole achievement was the establishment of a regional bank, the regional tourist agency and the business council.

The Middle East Regional Development Bank project was the one product of Amman that brought to the foreground a great number of contradictions. While the bank's capital, at first, was set at \$25 billion, it was gradually reduced to \$5 billion. To date, however, only \$1.25 billion has been agreed upon.

The industrialised European nations should have transferred 60 per cent of the original \$5 billion, but Germany, and later the European Union, rejected the idea of contributing to the establishment of a bank they believed would be a US-controlled political pawn. Europe's opposition to the idea of the bank began to gather momentum during the evening session of the first day of the conference.

During a press conference, France's Minister of Industry Yves Gallan, said that France would not take part in this project and that it was waiting for the next regional economic conference when it would evaluate how well the project had fared.

Meanwhile, Günter Richrodt, the German minister of economy, emphasised that this bank was, to put it simply, an unrealistic project and was an example of the US "showing off". The bank, he said, would not live long.

To compound matters, the remaining 40 per cent, which was to be raised by the Gulf states, was not forthcoming. Saudi Arabia rejected the idea of the bank due to the existence of other Arab banks and funds which can be expanded to provide the same ser-

vices as those of the proposed bank. Moreover, Saudi Arabia, as a result of the Gulf War, was shouldering a sizable debt at the time. Following Saudi Arabia's lead, the other Gulf states, with the exception of Qatar, objected to the bank's credit system and demanded an extension of soft loans with lower interest rates.

In practice, this bank will not differ from other commercial banks and, as a result, its mechanisms will serve Arab-Israeli joint ventures. Moreover, the US's aim behind this bank is quite clear: namely to bring to an end the Arab boycott of Israel and normalise relations between the two sides.

Conditions for the bank's establishment stipulated that all transactions be undertaken only with the private sector. This stipulation would, in turn, strengthen the position of the Israeli private sector which is already stronger than its Arab counterparts. It would also allow the Israeli private sector to impose its full control on the markets. And Israel, suffering as a result of the Arab boycott, would, after the establishment of the bank, have access to Arab financial resources.

Arguably, one can conclude that the main outcome of the Amman conference was the redistribution of Arab wealth between the Arabs and Israel. This was accomplished through redirecting Arab resources to develop the Israeli economy by financing projects presented by Israel to the conference.

During this conference, Israel's agenda revolved around a form of economic cooperation independent of the peace process. It proposed a total of 162 projects valued at \$25.3 billion. Egypt, on the other hand, pre-

sented 85 large-scale investment enterprises valued at LE255 billion (\$7.35 billion). The Israeli project blueprint was composed of 260 pages, including proposals for regional cooperation projects within the framework of the Mediterranean countries, as well as graphs, maps and the anticipated costs of those projects.

The portfolio also included research on the current economic conditions of the countries expected to join the new regional order as envisaged by Israel. The document specified that the final aim of the Amman conference, was primarily establishing a regional grouping of Mediterranean countries with a common market and an elected central authority similar to that of the European Economic Community (EEC). In order to realise this objective, Israel recommended that bilateral and multi-lateral projects in the fields of desert research and desalination should be undertaken. Major international financial institutions would implement ventures requiring huge capital, under the supervision of the countries concerned.

The final stage of realising its objective would be the formation of the new regional order and the gradual development of its official institutions. One of the important points raised by Israel, in this context, is the reduction of the region's military expenditure by one-third or one-half, in order to save \$20 billion annually and to finance projects in the new regional order.

It was suggested that the oil-producing countries of the Gulf also contribute one per cent of their oil revenue for the same purpose, as well as for the establishment of the Middle East bank. The Israeli plan, however, stressed that these moves would not affect international oil prices.

Market report

FOLLOWING a four-week lull, the capital market got a much-needed boost, with its index gaining 1.35 points to close at 234.02 for the week ending 24 October. To a great extent, the rebound is due to the overcoming of glitches in the new clearing and settlement system that was installed nearly one month ago. The Capital Market Authority's chairman, Abd-el-Hamid Ibrahim, announced last week that all the previously-suspended transactions were successfully completed.

In the manufacturing sector, shares of the

Alexandria Portland Cement Company gained LE49.25 to close at 472, while those of the Middle and West Delta Mills company inched up by LE3 to close at LE55.5. Shares of the South Cairo and Giza Mills and Bakeries gained LE1 to level off at LE52.5, while trading in shares of the Upper Egypt Mills Company accounted for 14.07 per cent of total trading. While 321,965 shares of the company changed hands, they nonetheless closed at LE106.25, LE2.75 lower than their opening price.

Other manufacturing sector companies re-

acted sizably gains in terms of their share value. Shares of the Medina Nasr Housing and Development gained LE29.5 per share to close at LE185, while those of the Helipolis Housing and Development Company gained LE22.15 to close at LE133.75. Recording a 50 per cent increase, shares of the Salama Housing and Contractors Company closed at LE15, while those of the Cairo Housing and Development Company lost 13.76 per cent of their opening value to close at LE12.

The financial and real estate sector's index

fared well during the week, gaining 6.78 points to close at 297.01 mainly as a result of an increase in the share value of 10 of the sector's companies. Shares of the Nationale Societe Generale Bank gained LE60 per share to close at LE568. The Credit International Bank was the market's shining star for the week, trading LE26.9 million in shares for a total of 18.07 per cent of total market turnover.

In all, the shares of 26 companies increased in value, 28 decreased and 35 remained unchanged.

Back on track

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- Réfugiés
Le Zaïre déstabilisé
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La baisse qui perturbe le marché



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Exécutif
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et Rédacteur en Chef
Ibrahim Nafie

Edited by Ghada Ragab

مكتبة من الأصل

Al-Ahram: A Diwan of contemporary life

At precisely 2.35am on Friday 15 June 1901, the era of *Al-Ahram's* founding generation drew to a close. At this point in its long history, *Al-Ahram* had almost completed its first quarter of a century since it first appeared on 5 August 1876. Thus on the threshold of its silver jubilee, Bichara Taqla passed away, nine years after his brother and co-founder, Salim Taqla, who died on 8 August 1892.

Although it was Salim who had taken the initiative in founding *Al-Ahram*, we believe that of the two founders, Bichara was the more important. This is not merely a question of titles, Bichara having been awarded the rank of pasha while Salim had only attained the rank of Bek. There were many other reasons for Bichara's greater importance.

To begin with, Bichara had been present in a position of responsibility throughout this entire period in the newspaper's life, an opportunity that divine will had deprived his brother from. Thus, Bichara had served the newspaper in partnership with his brother and afterwards in his individual capacity.

Very early on in *Al-Ahram's* career, an article published in 1877 about the plight of the Egyptian peasant incurred the wrath of the Khedive Ismail, and it was Bichara who paid the price. He spent three days in prison until he was rescued by the French consul-general, while his brother had fled the wrath of the Khedive by seeking asylum in the Russian consulate.

The newspaper almost met an untimely death on another occasion. This was three years later in 1882 with the outbreak of the Orabi revolution when the antagonism between the Orabi revolutionaries and *Al-Ahram* became too heated for the Taqla brothers. They decided to suspend publication temporarily, close their offices and head back to Lebanon. After the bombing of Alexandria and the withdrawal of the rebels, the Khedive Tawfiq, barricaded in safety behind the British fleet, invited them back. It was Bichara who accepted the risk of returning to the smoldering port to resume

NBE to finance Chevening grants

IN LINE WITH its pivotal role in encouraging higher education in Egypt, an agreement has been signed between the National Bank of Egypt, the British Embassy and the British Cultural Centre which will grant scholarships for study at the masters' level at British universities.

NBE will fund £2500 of the total £15,000 scholarship, covering tuition for one year, residential fees, expenses and travel tickets.

The granting authority has agreed to limit the subject of the masters' degree to banking, in order to develop the capabilities of employees in this field. The bank will participate in the selection process along with the British Cultural Centre.

High turnout for Systems 96

THE GENERAL manager of Munich Exhibitions, Joachim Enßlin, said that more than 1731 telecommunications and information technology companies took part in the Systems 96 exhibition, which was held 21-25 October. Ten thousand visitors visited the exhibition, one of the most widely-known exhibitions in Europe.

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Next week in Money and Business: Cutting down government spending

1 5 3



If you sense that a word you might write will cause a person to lose a piastre, even if it will reap thousands for *Al-Ahram*, do not write it." Bichara Taqla, *Al-Ahram's* co-founder and editor-in-chief told a group of reporters. He spoke shortly before he died in 1901, the year of the newspaper's silver jubilee. Bichara pioneered many innovations, including a twice-daily foreign news update for subscribers and the establishment of a French-language twin for the Arabic *Al-Ahram*. In this instalment of his *Diwan chronicles*, Dr Yunan

Labil Rizq tells how instrumental Bichara was in laying the foundations of what is today the Arab world's largest and most prestigious press establishment.

have been undertaken periodically, were to affect his personal life as much as that of *Al-Ahram's* readers. Indeed, it was on one such tour that he met his future wife. His engagement took place on 15 June 1889 and he died on 15 June 1901."

Egyptian public opinion clearly considered Bichara's European tour a service to the nation. Upon his return from his 1884 tour at the height of negotiations on the Egyptian question, a delegation from the State Legislative Council called at the offices of *Al-Ahram* to present to Bichara Taqla a gold watch upon which had been inscribed, "*Al-Ahram* - a national emblem". The watch was accompanied by a letter in which the parliamentary members expressed their gratitude for the services Bichara Taqla performed for the nation through *Al-Ahram*.

It was in his capacity as owner and editor-in-chief of *Al-Ahram* that Bichara Taqla won his title, first bek, and then pasha. These were conferred on him directly by the Supreme Porte in Istanbul. It was no arduous task for Bichara to assume the ad-

ministration and editorship of the newspaper in the wake of his brother's death in 1892. Indeed, the transition was quite smooth in that it marked only a second phase of the newspaper's founding towards which Bichara had made the largest contribution.

Al-Ahram's continued success had much to do with the way in which Bichara Taqla responded to the many changes Egypt underwent during the last decade of the 19th century. The most significant development in terms of Egyptian history was the evident intention of the British to prolong their occupation, at the same time the succession of Abbas II as the khedive at the outset of that decade inspired a growing spirit of anti-British resistance. In the on-going conflict between the khedival palace and the headquarters of the British High Commissioner, the country's newspapers constituted one of the protagonists' major instruments. There was no middle ground. Bichara had to choose sides and he opted for the nationalist camp championed by the young khedive.

Al-Ahram under Bichara thus waged sev-

eral battles against the British, focusing primarily on two areas of British policy: the occupation's attempt to consolidate its control over the Egyptian government administration and the expedition to conquer Sudan to establish British control over that sprawling territory at Egypt's expense.

In terms of the administration of the newspaper, *Al-Ahram* saw two major turning points that would effect its life as a national institution. The first, we believe, was fundamental to the newspaper's longevity; the second was instrumental in establishing a tradition that continues until today.

The first turning point occurred in November 1899. This date marks the move of *Al-Ahram's* headquarters from Alexandria to Cairo. This was not merely to be closer to the pulse of events in the capital. Bichara, in taking this decision, must have determined that the future well-being of the newspaper depended on its being totally Egyptian in character. By moving from Alexandria, its birthplace, to Cairo, the editor-in-chief severed the last remaining ties with his original homeland in Lebanon.

As for the second turning point, this was the publication of *Al-Ahram's* first Arabic newspaper. With the inauguration of *Le Pyramide*, Bichara began to direct the operations of two newspapers, setting the precedent which the *Al-Ahram* institution continues to follow today... Directly or indirectly, the newspapers that featured obituaries of Bichara Taqla, regardless of their political positions, agreed on two points. The first was that he had demonstrated a reverence for his profession that was rare among those engaged in this field. The second was that *Al-Ahram* had made Bichara a very wealthy man. Bichara, as most of the newspapers that commemorated him agreed, was a scrupulous manager of his newspaper's finances. Money would not be squandered, but it would be fumigated, and generously when possible, into the essentials: renovating the printing presses, hiring correspondents in Egypt and abroad, and investigative tours

abroad for himself or other correspondents. In short, Bichara's attitude towards his newspaper was that of any sensible entrepreneur who knows he must invest cleverly in order to reap a profit. Perhaps one of the reasons other contemporary newspapers were so short-lived was that their owners lacked this solid business sense.

There can be no doubt about his entrepreneurship. Everything that was written about the man in the wake of his untimely death (he was only 48 when he died) confirms that the newspaper owes to him the inception of the traditions that would guide the operations of *Al-Ahram* in later years. The first edition of the newspaper after his death contained his legacy to *Al-Ahram's* writers. It was during his final bout of illness that he composed: "Write in the spirit of those subjects that are of profit to this nation. In the service of the truth, feel no one. Avoid slander and turn a deaf ear to abuse, even if it is directed against myself."

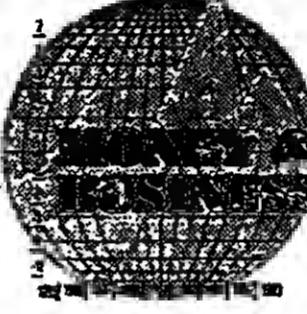
A subsequent section of the eulogy contains the testimony of one of Bichara's closest friends and associates, Nigoli Bey Toma, who said that he was present when Bichara told a group of *Al-Ahram* writers, "If you sense that a word you might write will cause a person to lose a piastre, even if it will reap thousands for *Al-Ahram*, do not write it, even if the newspaper were to lose many times the amount, it might have gained. Bear in mind that the Orient is our native home and to it we devote our services."

Given his "greater share" in the establish-

ment of the newspaper, his impressive stature in the world of journalism, the dynamism with which he steered the newspaper, it is little wonder that his sudden death would come as a great shock to all, regardless of their attitudes toward his editorial positions.

The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.

MONEY & BUSINESS



(l-r) Otto Wiesehauser, minister of telecommunications and transport, Bavaria, and his wife Karoly Lotz, minister of transport and communications, and his wife and Manfred Wutzeler, chairman of the board of Munich Exhibitions, during the opening celebrations for Systems 96
Al-Ahram's exhibit at Systems 96
Joachim Enßlin, general manager of Munich Exhibitions
Ernst Kick, manager of Systems 96

of the decision-makers attend Systems to learn about the latest technological developments in the field.

Systems 97 will be held from 27-31 October and will focus on providing solutions for communication problems.

Enßlin said that the new exhibitions authority will be inaugurated in 1998, which

will allow many international exhibitions to be held.

For more information on Systems 97, contact Mrs. Heba Azer from the German Chamber of Commerce at 341300214.

From Munich:
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Meridien Sharm El-Sheikh:

Fruits of Saudi-Egyptian investment

A management contract for the Meridien of Sharm El-Sheikh was signed by Saudi investor Sobhi Al-Khedari and his partners representing Tirana Tourism Investment and the representatives of Meridien International, Gerald Lawless, managing director of Forte/Meridien Hotels Middle East.

Al-Khedari, general manager of the project, said that the hotel is situated overlooking Tiran Island, the most beautiful site in the area. In choosing the site, special consideration was given to Meridien International due to the fine reputation it enjoys.

The hotel includes 265 rooms exclusively designed and fully equipped with panoramic terraces, in addition to 20 villas consisting of 2 floors which includes 3 bedrooms, a reception room, dining room, 3 bathrooms, a kitchenette and a terrace with a total area of 200m. The hotel includes a diving centre and conference and convention facilities.

The hotel is located 5km from Neama Bay and 2km from Sharm El-Sheikh airport. The hotel will open in 1998 with the luxurious sophisticated refinement of Le Meridien French style to be part of the largest tourism-oriented zone in Egypt.



Egyptian-Chinese Bank approved

The Egyptian-Chinese Committee held in Beijing from 24-29 October discussed the establishment of an Egyptian-Chinese bank that's expected to boost trade and eliminate obstacles related to financing between the two countries, said Rushdi Sekr,

head of the International Committee of Exhibitions and Markets.

Sekr added that the Chinese side agreed in principle on establishing the bank which will play a prominent role in increasing transactions between Egyptian and Chinese companies. He concluded his statement saying that the Egyptian-Chinese Chamber of Commerce will discuss means of increasing trade between the two countries.

Trade with China

AHMED Guweili, minister of trade, met with Chinese Prime Minister Jiang Zemin, who hailed the ongoing progress achieved in the economic field. Zemin stated that he is looking forward to meeting Egyptian Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri to discuss means of upgrading commercial exchange.

During his meeting with the Chinese prime minister, Guweili reviewed the works of the Egyptian Chinese Committee and the consultations made with Chinese ministers. At the heart of the discussion was the economic reform programme in Egypt which has borne fruits in bringing down inflation and increasing foreign currency.

These measures encouraged indebted countries to write off \$4 billion, which testifies to the seriousness of economic reform in Egypt.

Guweili stated in a press conference in Beijing that the possibility of transferring Chinese technology to Egypt was being examined through cooperation in the fields of petrochemicals, textiles, pharmaceuticals and fertilisers.

Guweili also stated that the conference centre in Nasr City is an example of Chinese-Egyptian cooperation, which can be seen in the financial and technical assistance it provides Egypt.

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Boot camps

With US Middle East envoy Dennis Ross now back in Washington after three weeks of mediation between Palestinians and Israelis on the seemingly mythical Hebron troop redeployment, US officials remain optimistic that the issue will be resolved within a month.

But for 12-year-old Helmi Shawash, who lies in his grave after "allegedly" being pistol whipped by a Jewish settler, optimism is no longer an option. Helmi, and more likely than not, his sister who has leukaemia, have discovered the hard way that when it comes to boorish savagery and an absolute disregard for the value of human life and dignity, few can match wits with the roughly 400 extremist settlers residing in Hebron, and their erstwhile leader-of-sorts, Benjamin Netanyahu.

While Netanyahu is quick to accuse the Palestinians of dragging out the issue, his fellow right-wingers are mustering up the courage to defend themselves against other 12-year-olds who may be wielding stones. And yet Netanyahu is concerned about their safety. So much so, in fact, that Israeli troops once again fired tear gas, rubber bullets and live rounds at crowds of stone-throwing Palestinian youths mourning the death of a child.

While tragic, Helmi's death is unsurprisingly representative of the hypocritical tone and text the peace process has assumed over the last few months. Arguing that he is not bound to agreements reached by the previous Labour government, Netanyahu has approved the construction of another 8,200 settlement homes for Jews. His explanation was that it was a move approved by the previous administration, but had been frozen. Other examples of this brand of hypocrisy abound.

The most striking idiosyncrasy of this duplicity is that Israelis are blind to the fact that it is occurring. They speak of the value of human life based on their Holocaust experience, and yet the latest fashion craze in the country are Nazi-style boots. In this light, one is forced to wonder what kind of boots Helmi's killer was wearing when he stepped on the child's throat. And, what kind of boots will Netanyahu be wearing when he takes that final, decisive step onto the heart of the peace process.

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On course and moving ahead

Recent indicators paint a rosy picture of Egypt's economic prospects which the third Middle East/ North Africa Economic Conference will only enhance, writes Ibrahim Nafie



of the total, a clear demonstration of increased international confidence in Egypt as one of the fastest developing financial markets.

The government is keen to increase levels of investment in the Egyptian economy both domestically, regionally and internationally. To facilitate an enhanced climate for investment customs and taxation procedures have been streamlined. The government is also planning further reforms. Its legislative programme includes investment incentives which, in addition to preserving incentives already in place will be expanded to encourage new investments away from the Nile Valley. The proposed law for investment incentives — the unified investment law, as it has been termed — will also contain performance related incentives conditional on achieving certain targets in specified areas, e.g. exports. The law will also include provisions to allow preferential treatment to be accorded to labour intensive projects or projects likely to involve significant technological transfers.

The proposed law thus represents a continuation of policies concerned not just with the narrow parameters of finance, but which seek to encourage comprehensive development.

Can we honestly expect that Egypt will sacrifice the possibility of a brighter and more economically secure future for its people just to play into the hands of those who would like to see Egypt flounder in the economic crises of its past, leaving it prey to pressures from abroad? Egypt's comprehensive and strategic vision, which has already resulted in a series of positive steps forward backed by solid indicators, are proof enough of Egypt's determination to progress in the face of machinations from some quarters to derail that advance. Egypt knows that only when it is politically, militarily and economically strong and independent will it be able to protect the just and lasting peace that is in the interests of all people in the region.

economic reform, the time has come for Egypt to focus on the future. And all the indications are in place that that future will be a brighter time for Egyptians, indeed for all Arabs.

Egypt has entered a period of unprecedented stability. After five years of continuous reform the economy is well placed for expansion. The budget deficit has been dramatically reduced to one per cent of GDP, as opposed to 20 per cent at the beginning of the eighties. At the same time the annual rate of inflation has dropped to less than eight per cent, while the exchange rate has been steady for four years despite the deregulation of markets. The balance of current transactions produced a surplus of \$630 million in 1994-1995, exceeding IMF predictions. Foreign currency reserves have reached \$18.5 billion, which covers import costs for one and a half years, the highest reserve/import ratio in the developing world.

Such economic indicators will prove a great incentive to investors. What we need now, though, is to furnish investors with the best possible climate. Given its past achievement in the field of ec-

mulate, investment will underpin economic growth which, over the next few years should exceed eight per cent.

In the past Egypt has been hampered by a paucity of domestic savings to finance the investment necessary to stimulate growth. Hence the importance of the conference which will provide an important shop window in which to display Egypt's unsurpassed advantages to the foreign investor.

Up till now direct foreign investments have been limited. Of the \$90 billion of direct investment in the developing world last year the Middle East and North Africa attracted barely \$2 billion. But the successful implementation by the Prime Minister El-Ganzouri of policies conducive to growth will prove of great help in attracting an increased share of direct investment.

The success of the privatisation programme is already reflected in the increased volume of trade on the stock market. In July transactions involving foreign investors accounted for almost 69 per cent

of the total, a clear demonstration of increased international confidence in Egypt as one of the fastest developing financial markets.

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ple in the region.

The Chirac factor

Akhbar El-Yom: "President Chirac's neutral stance should be welcomed by both sides [the Arabs and Israel]. It is what is expected, and acceptable, of a mediator, especially when that mediator is a great power such as France, which sides with neither party against the other, nor is it willing to support the aggressor against the victim, unlike what the world's first super power, the US, has accustomed us to."

(Abdel-Aal El-Baqouri, 23 October)

AI-Gomhouria: "There is no doubt that the idea of a European role is strongly welcomed by the parties to the peace process. Hopefully, Israel will revise its stance after having listened to new European ideas during Chirac's visit to the region and his statements on the true meaning of security and stability and the need to implement international resolutions and agreements on the Palestinian problem and the Arab-Israeli conflict."

(Editorial, 27 October)

October: "In the final analysis, one can say that the European move may not be given a chance and that matters will remain as they are, with the peace process stalled. But the Arab-European diplomatic drive will certainly help to deliver a message to Israel and the US to the effect that the whole world now knows who is holding up the peace process and who does not want peace."

(Saleh El-Fitani, 27 October)

AI-Shaab: "If it is only natural that the Arabs should be happy with a French (European) role that is different from the dominant US role in the region, they should naturally realize that the real problem is not so much the absence of a European role but the absence of a unified Arab stance. Without strong Arab movement, the European role can be of little benefit in competing with that of the pro-Israel US."

(Talaat Romaihi, 25 October)

AI-Wafat: "We can confidently say that not even Chirac himself, after his recent tour, expects that Europe should suddenly become a major mediator in the peace process. At best France will be in the limelight in the region. This is for many reasons — the first is Israel's refusal on the grounds that it would complicate matters. The second is the US's refusal to allow Europe a role once again in the region. Also, many Arab states do not believe in a European role in the peace process... Things could have been different had the Arabs adopted a unified stance."

(Mahmoud El-Tahomi, 28 October)

Al-Ahali: "Today's conditions are different from those of the '70s and Chirac is not Giscard d'Estaing or Mitterrand. He is more of a 'de Gaulle' and more aware of France's global role particularly in the Arab world. He has called for a strong alliance between Damascus and Paris to serve bilateral interests, the Middle East and Europe. He has also fraudulently called for a European role in the peace negotiations between the Arabs and Israel and has supported the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. Regardless of whether Israel

support his argument that peace is no more than an armistice, a 'cold peace' made necessary only by the Arabs' inability to wage a 'hot war'."

One way of depriving Netanyahu of the support of a majority of Israelis would be to 'reward' those of his countrymen who advocate peace — on lines acceptable to the Arab parties — and 'punish' those who obstruct it. Such a selective boycott, as it were,

will require difficult decisions on both sides. Israeli peace forces will have to accept not only the creation of a sovereign Palestinian state — which they already do — but also that its capital be in Jerusalem, that withdrawal from the Golan and Syria's understanding of the land-for-peace trade-off, that Israel abandons its nuclear option, that it withdraws from South Lebanon etc. Arab popular forces will also have to make difficult decisions, such as limiting the boycott to anti-peace Israelis, thus signaling that normalisation of relations is possible once ambiguities in the land-for-peace formula are removed. It goes without saying that the boycott should become selective only after Israeli peace forces openly commit themselves to upholding these Arab demands.

The danger here is that a selective boycott could encourage forces in the Arab world with a vested

Close up

Salama A. Salama

The trade in innocence

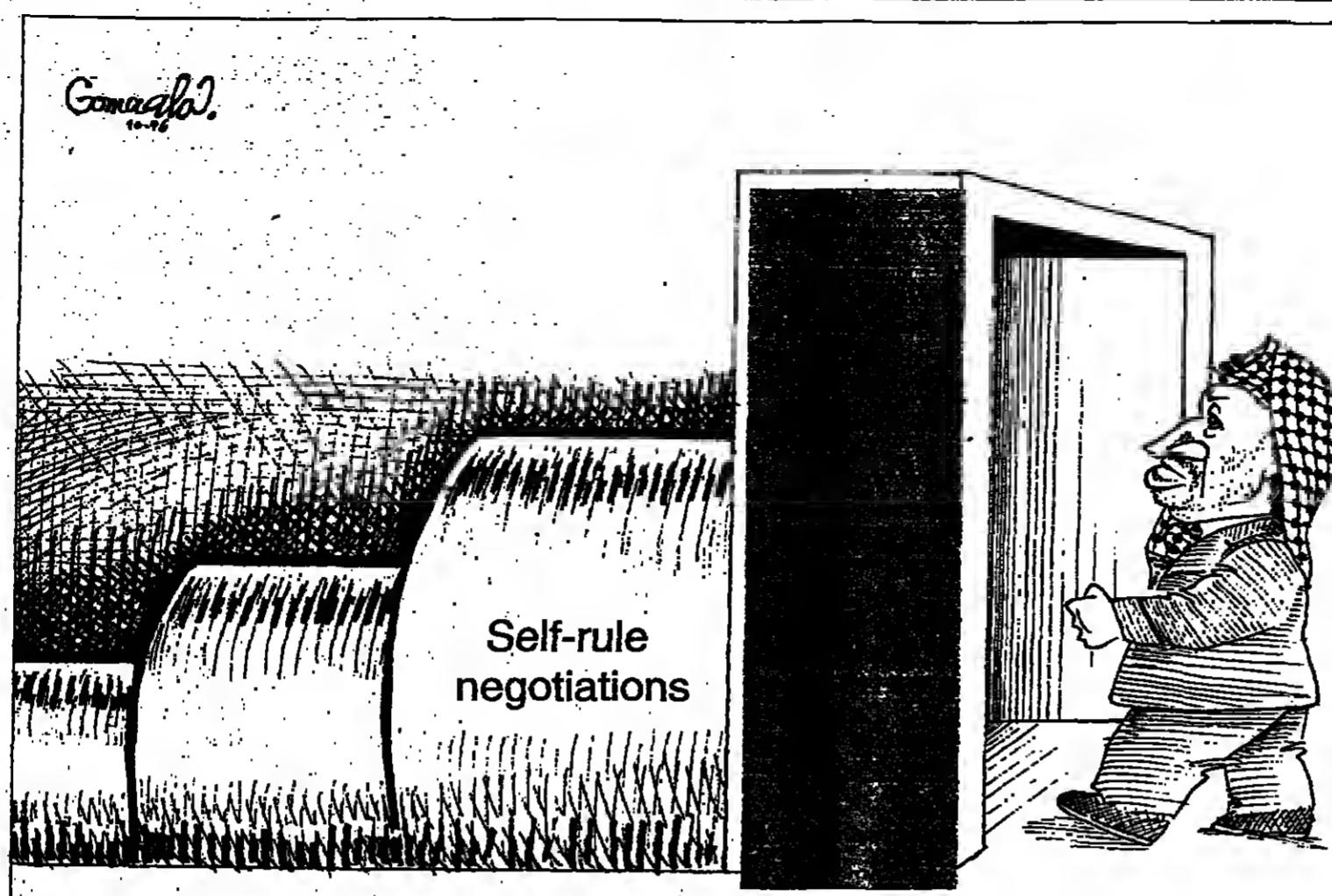
Trading in children for sexual purposes has reached unprecedented levels, and in Europe is attracting a great deal of press coverage. Those who follow European newscasts on television cannot fail to be horrified by the harrowing reports of the sexual abuse of minors. The latest such crime, which sent shock waves well beyond national borders, concerned the discovery of the corpses of two children in a quiet Belgian town. The children, it transpired, were victims of a well-organised ring of child abusers.

Originally the trade in children was carried out under the respectable banner of wealthy but childless European and American couples adopting children of poor Asian or Latin American families. It quickly expanded, though, to procuring children for sexual purposes and the trade rapidly became enmeshed with organised prostitution and international drug dealing.

The vast majority of the clientele making use of this criminal network are European men who seek their pleasure abroad; most commonly to Asia and Latin America. Under the guise of travel agencies, specialising in tours of extremely poor countries which either have no child protection legislation or which do not enforce the legislation which is in place, such people arrange itineraries the sole purpose of which is to allow them to exploit the young and defenceless. Nor are there any statistics to register the number of victims of this trade, though in countries such as Brazil, Thailand and the Philippines, the numbers of children forcibly involved in the sex trade could reach tens, if not hundreds, of thousands.

International conventions, ratified by the UN, generally address themselves to safeguarding children's rights to education and healthcare, and to protecting children from forced labour, usually in agricultural production or industrial projects. And while the rich industrial nations bring ever more pressure to bear on poorer developing nations — threatening them with GATT agreements to oblige them to stop using under-age labour regardless of traditional social and economic customs within the family or tribal units — they have yet to formulate adequate deterrents capable of protecting children from sexual exploitation. It is now a matter of urgency that this issue be addressed. The conference that will be convened in Sweden offers perhaps the best platform for hammering out the required legislation.

And while religious and social norms may go some way towards protecting children from sexual abuse in the Arab world, this gives no reason for complacency. This matter cannot be neglected.



A three per cent solution

The facts are, writes **Edward Said**, that neither Israel nor the US has the slightest desire to foster a peace process that guarantees Palestinian self-determination or independent statehood. So what is left to be done?

Two principal themes in Arab and Palestinian discourse emerged during and after the recent crisis over the provocatively opened Jerusalem tunnel. One was the need to rally round the Palestinian National Authority in its time of crisis with Netanyahu. The second was the even greater urgency of returning to the signed peace documents between the PLO and Israel.

Both are understandable reactions to a serious sense of great crisis and consternation. For without the Oslo Accords the Palestinian Authority would lose a great deal of its international legitimacy, as well as its internal coherence. Besides, it is natural in a time of what seems to have been a moment of extra arrogance by Israel, and after Palestinian lives had been lost, to speak passionately about laying down differences, setting aside inter-Palestinian quarrels, dropping all partisan politics to the interest of the common welfare. A former Democratic Front military leader, now living in Ramallah after a prolonged residence in Tunis, vented the thought that it was almost immoral of intellectuals at this time to say anything that might be deemed contrary to the accepted consensus, especially after Palestinian martyrs had fallen to the national cause.

White I understand and to some extent sympathise with some of this, I must also say that I remain unconvinced by this whole line of reasoning. Certainly unity is a good thing, as is maintaining pressure on the Israelis, whose shameless and contemptible attitudes to Arabs and Palestinians have been the bane of the Middle East for five generations. But I cannot accept the thesis that we must all plunge ourselves heedlessly into the seething emotional turbulence of the present, without a thought or lacking any clear ideas about why we are in this terrible state to begin with.

The condition of Arab and Palestinian politics today is desperate not because of an excess, but because of a poverty of reason and responsibility. Is it the intellectual's duty simply to become a member of the chorus, or is it more valuable to stand aside (which implies detachment but, I think, a greater commitment to the common good) and reflect without undue emotion on why we are here, and how we can move forward? The answer for me is clear: critical thought is much more useful now than flag-waving, which I have always thought is one of the cheapest political tactics ever invented.

In its 14 October issue the influential American weekly magazine, *The New Yorker*, published a very long account of the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations in light of the impasse caused by Netanyahu's policies. The author is Connie Bruck, someone who has never before written about the Middle East, but whose work furnished readers with one of the most complete and intimate descriptions of what has been taking place. Yet it is also perfectly clear that despite her access to the substantial number of influential Palestinians whom she quotes (Abu Mazen, Abu Alia who is her central source, Nabil Shaath, Mahmoud Darwish, Nasir Al-Qidwa, Hassan Asfour, among others) some of whom were directly involved in the negotiations with Israel, Bruck seems to be an ideological Labour Zionist. Throughout her article she gives one example af-

ter another — some of which I shall describe below — of how Peres literally cheated and bullied his Palestinian interlocutors, leaving them in the end with a pathetic patchwork of tiny autonomous regions that she says, added up only to about three per cent of the land.

Yet she concludes her article by praising Rabin and Peres and Uri Savim, with whom she reports Abu Alia established a "mystical" bond, as men of principle and courage. The Labour leaders, she said, had a "moral commitment" which nevertheless "extracted a concession after concession from the Palestinians, unquestionably overpowering them". Then in total contradiction with her own account she adds that the Israelis "did not see the Palestinians as a lesser order of being", whereas everything she talks about suggests that they did. "They did not see them as worthy subjects for whom some small, spotty parcel ... of their homeland should suffice," which is exactly what the Israelis did give the Palestinians, and exactly how they did (and continue) to see them.

I mention all this about Bruck in order first of all to show that even when confronted with evidence of their own research and selection, supporters of Israel can override that evidence and conclude that some Zionists are fine people, with a moral commitment. I recall feeling the same way when I first read Benny Morris's important book on the birth of the Palestinian refugee problem, in which Morris — also a liberal Israeli — gives example after example of the concerted Zionist plan to drive out the Palestinians in 1948. Yet he too concludes, inexplicably, that there was no real plan; only a series of incidents that were the results of a general war.

But as it may, Bruck's *New Yorker* article is important not because of its peculiar conclusions but because this is the first non-Arab and non-Palestinian account of the process from the American and Israeli point of view that confirms what I, and many other critics of the process, have been saying. The article deserves translation into Arabic for its details and accuracy, though here I can only give two or three examples of how the future of Palestine was negotiated.

Bruck tells us that, according to Arafat's aides, the Palestinian leader probably never read the agreement, relying on his assistants (who gave him a "rosy picture" of the contents) or on a quick reading of the headings. Abu Mazen told Bruck that for several months after the Washington ceremonies Arafat did not realise that he was not getting a state, only autonomy. Furthermore, Arafat regularly intervened in the negotiations, making it easier for the Israelis to get concessions from him which his own people had already refused; the Norwegians were useful in this, and I must say, they emerge from Bruck's account as manipulative and slippery, as well as unreasonably pro-Israel to what they did.

The Israel plan, as formulated by the great Peres, was to "remake and transform" Arafat into a partner for the Israelis, so that he could make historically unparalleled concessions to them and remain as an instrument for implementing their schemes. Before the negotiations began in earnest an Israeli-American lawyer with years of international experience had

drafted the agreement in sixteen drafts; for their part, however, the Palestinians had done nothing. Bruck describes their woeful lack of preparation, their various cults of personality, and the duplicity of which they were victims, at the expense of their people of course.

The worst deception by the Israelis was in Oslo. Two sides had agreed not only on a schedule of re-deployment, but also on what percentage of the land held by Israel would be conceded to the Palestinians. The coordination of timetables and percentages over a period of several months gave the process a semblance of success for the Palestinians; although they began by getting autonomy in the main cities — 3 per cent of the whole — according to the scheduled-percentage plan they would be getting about 70 per cent (some thought it was 80 per cent) of the West Bank. When the documents were drafted and ready for signature, Bruck says that the percentages had been eliminated unilaterally. But the furious Palestinians were forced to sign anyway. This meant that if Netanyahu wants "to go back" to the implementation of Oslo he can withdraw six inches and say he had exchanged land for peace. The fact, therefore, is that Peres, Blix, Savir and company had bamboozled the Palestinians, all the while posturing as serious men of peace when in fact they had treated the Palestinians as untutored savages who were entitled to the half a plot that Bruck unaccountably says was not to be their destiny!

It is essential to insist that Bruck writes as someone in favour of the peace process, by no means as a critic or opponent. She too longs for the days of Peres and his group, which is to say that they were plausibly ripping off the Palestinians, while the rutinian Netanyahu, who has more or less the same thing in mind, is less presentable, more embarrassing for supporters of Israel.

In view of the current crisis, therefore, it seems quite evident that a good deal of responsibility for the horrors of what the Palestinian people now endure at the hands of Israel is due to the negotiators, with Mr Arafat at the top. This leadership produced the hideous map of many Bantustans, they agreed to the settlements, they did not prepare, they lied (Bruck says that Arafat "always lied"), they accepted the plan without real timetables and percentages, they made the concessions, they in effect connived with the Israelis to put forth what in reality was a travesty of peace, in which Palestinians got very little except the autonomy regime and the dubious privileges of running municipal affairs. Real power has remained in the hands of the Israeli sovereign, entrances and exits, security, Jerusalem, settlements, roads, water, 97 per cent of the West Bank.

To return to Oslo, which has been the central plea in official Palestinian discourse, is therefore to go back to the very situation that produced the mess we are in right now. During the 1921 Anglo-Irish negotiations, when Britain was the most powerful country in the world, the Irish resistance leaders Michael Collins and Eamon de Valera always said that their ultimate strength in dealing with the British was their people and their power of refusal.

Is it not right at this juncture to refuse merely to reiterate the well-known formulas about national unity, while more of Palestine is conceded unwise, and without broad popular participation? I agree we face a national emergency, but over four million Palestinians exist outside of Palestine; why are their needs and concerns never taken into account? Why are Palestinians in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and the Gulf never consulted?

Inside Palestine there is a rule of autocracy in which people are afraid to speak, in which the press is controlled, and in which only authorised opinion is permitted. To say, as Mr Ahmed Khalil famously claimed in a recent article, that it is irresponsible to ask for democracy to Palestine now, since we must wait for 15 years before we can begin to think of democratic practices, is the rankest idiocy. As we give up more and more of ourselves to the Authority, letting Arafat do what he wishes without any check or accountability on his power to use his bloated security services, we are being as bad as any autocratic third world state. And we do not even have a state. How can we repeat the tragic course of most of the Arab countries, in which national unity and a state of permanent emergency have been used as a cover for sustained dictatorship, corruption and mediocrity, plus more and more losses to Israel?

The facts are that neither Israel nor the US has the slightest desire to foster a peace process that guarantees Palestinian self-determination or independent statehood. These are the plain facts, as even superficial scrutiny of the various peace arrangements between the PLO and Israel will immediately attest. The time for illusions and falsehoods is now over. Palestinian blood has been spilled in the cause of an agreement which is designed specifically to keep Palestinians under the perpetual domination of the Israelis. We have no hurt the Israelis, we have not defeated them in anything: why then do we expect that they will respect us, or, as the official Palestinian mind keeps hoping, do we delude ourselves into believing that they will give us something? To depend on the US for anything more than wresting further concessions out of us is, in my opinion, utter delusion. We must learn to live in a reality that we create by our own efforts, and we must stop waiting for some external savior to appear and fix everything for us.

I have been criticised for not offering alternatives, being too negative etc. But everything I write is premised on the idea that what we have before us is a bad alternative, and that it needs changing. To expect me, or any single individual, to provide ready-made, easy solutions is part of the same ideological deformation that causes us at this late date to sit around waiting for a savior in the US or France or Russia. The only way forward is as a people, with all of us challenging those who have given away Palestine in a fit of distraction; we must speak out; we must hold meetings; we must ask questions as loudly and as publicly as possible. There are four alternatives already. And someone must finally be held to account for the loss via Oslo of what is left of Palestine. Alternative number five.

The right regulatory balance: key to productivity

Regulatory reforms are viewed by many as a prerequisite of increased productivity in the private sector. Mohamed A El-Erian examines some of the lessons to be gleaned from recent international experiences

What guidelines are in place for regulatory reforms undertaken in the context of structural reform programmes? Do regulatory reforms simply imply deregulation? How does one strike the balance between over-regulation and under-regulation?

These and similar questions are on the minds of policy makers everywhere — in industrial and developing countries alike — as they seek to implement policies aimed at encouraging private sector investment, employment creation and production. Fortunately, we now possess sufficient international experience to help answer such questions and to provide insights into Egypt's own performance.

Regulatory reforms in industrial and developing countries have been guided by a simple but important principle: reforms should target a more investor-friendly regulatory environment. This implies clear regulations that are insulated, as much as possible, from ad hoc and discretionary implementation and a reduction in the red tape that businesses face in dealing with various regulatory agencies, leaving them more time to devote to genuine production, investment and employment decisions.

To be credible and effective, regulatory changes must also be viewed as fair. They should not discriminate in favour of certain groups — typically state-owned enterprises and the large and entrenched private sector firms.

The success of regulatory reforms then can be measured in

the degree of reassurance felt by domestic and foreign investors that they are operating, and will continue to operate, within a transparent and predictable framework where procedures are implemented fairly and systematically.

Regulatory reform, therefore, is not synonymous with deregulation. Rather, it means striking the right balance between the over-regulation and under-regulation of various sectors and activities or, as economists are fond of saying, between correcting for market failure and correcting for government failure.

Deregulation in certain areas must therefore be accompanied by regulatory strengthening in other areas; generally those characterised by market failures and by the need to provide an enabling environment for the proper functioning of competitive markets, which implies government action to prevent collusion and monopoly; to protect consumers, detect insider trading and ensure prudent regulation and supervision of financial markets.

Not surprisingly, regulatory reform has been especially important in the context of privatisation and liberalisation efforts. Simply put, it is important to ensure that natural monopolies and former government monopolies do not abuse their market power when transferred to the private sector.

While stressing the importance of regulatory reforms, one

should not have unrealistic expectations about the immediacy of the benefits. They take time to materialise. New Zealand is often cited as a classic example. The very fundamental reforms undertaken in the 1980s bore significant fruit only in the 1990s, when the New Zealand economy emerged as one of the world's top performers.

It is also important to recognise that regulatory reforms are not easy. Vested interests have a way of resisting and fighting back. What is needed, therefore, is a comprehensive programme guided by a clear vision, commanding political will and skilled and responsive enforcement.

Finally, regulatory reforms are not just a government thing. They involve the whole of society and must benefit from the input of the private sector. The private sector must also contribute to promoting, among its own ranks, the right type of self-regulation.

Where does Egypt stand in terms of some of these simple considerations? An economist cannot fail but notice the important changes that have taken place in recent years in the regulatory environment impacting on key economic activities.

Egypt now has transparent interest rates and foreign exchange markets which have been instrumental in stabilising the economy, reducing inflation and building up a strong foreign exchange cushion — all of which strengthen the environment for investment. The external payments system has been

liberalised, the investment approval and registration process simplified, and sectors previously off-limits have been opened up to private participation.

These steps are all consistent with the right kind of deregulation. Egypt has also exerted efforts to strike the right balance with regard to regulation. The regulatory regime governing the financial sector has been strengthened through the many steps taken by the Central Bank of Egypt and, more recently, the Capital Market Authority.

On the whole Egypt has come a long way in escaping the regulatory imbalances that used to dominate economic activities. There remains, however, an unfinished policy agenda, as recognised by policy makers. Hence the significance of recent steps to strengthen the dialogue with the private sector, accelerate the privatisation programme, progress further with the rationalisation of investment incentives and procedures and continue with tax reform, including the improvement of tax administration. With further progress in these areas, Egypt can look forward to higher rates of investment, employment and growth.

The writer is deputy director of the Middle Eastern Department at the International Monetary Fund. The views expressed here are his own and do not necessarily reflect those of the IMF.

Soapbox

Showcase for Egypt

MENA III — should it go ahead? This question has been asked repeatedly. My view has always been the same. Yes it should go ahead, for the simple reason that it is in the best interest of Egypt as well as the Arabs.

For 20 years Egypt has paid the price for peace and should now reap its harvest. The economic summit is, after all, an investment bazaar. Those Middle East and North African countries participating will be doing so in an attempt to attract potential investors. It is, therefore, the perfect forum for Egypt to promote its considerable and growing attractions to investors.

Egypt's economic reforms have resulted in low inflation, a modest budget deficit, and a strong balance of payments and reserve situation. MENA III will afford an opportunity to further capitalise on these successes. The potential of its market base will not be lost on investors, nor will the availability of a well-educated labour force. In addition, Egypt has abundant water and energy resources. Its rich industrial base allows for the implementation of complementary industrial projects. Egypt's industrial structure is much less specialised than that of Israel, which — though it is always presented as the supposed winner in regional economics — can claim supremacy in only a few industrial fields, namely electronics, arms and diamond cutting.

Most international trade and transport networks will have to start and/or pass through Egypt. Already the Suez Canal and the Sumed line provide important North-South trade axes. And as peace prevails Egypt will also find itself at the centre of the East-West Africa-Asia axis.

So let us hold the November summit on time, the better to display the advantages of investing in Egypt.



Ali A Soliman

Mummies the word

David Blake
gets all
wrapped up

Aida, Verdi; Cairo Opera Company; The National Choir of Bulgaria; Cairo Opera Orchestra; Mustafa Nagui, conductor; Abdallah Saad, producer; Cairo Opera House, Main Hall, 23 & 25 October

Aida is a body stocking. She clings to everyone in the opera. Her father, her lover, the security risk field marshall who turns out to be no better than he should be, the pharaoh himself and his daughter Amneris, who positively loathes her. Verdi himself was not won on his *Aida*. She is a cool girl, who travels a rough journey under a bad star.

The thing *Aida* is a genuine terror, a sort of mystery play, a frenzied wowed by the genius of Verdi and the clever, less than flattering take on Ancient Egypt by du Locle. The Ancient Egyptians mummified everything — animals, gods, reptiles, themselves. And it is this aspect of *Aida* that is beginning to take shape in the Cairo production, frisked up by Saad. This *Aida* spells out the unsettling aspects of Ancient Egyptian life.

As the story winds to its end even Amneris herself, begeter of all the mis-calculations, ends in the dark, shivering pitously like a terrified bat. By the final curtain she has been fitted for her bandages.

Aida is a long sit and quite uncuttable. Verdi saw to that with his perfect workmanship. It is like a Ferrari. It floats along, purring, sometimes roaring, but always bursting with genius. Grumble if you like — oh no, not another *Aida* — but like the Nile it goes on forever and there is nothing that you can do about it.

The present house production begins to look very smart. The decor has been hammered into shape, and would do any opera house proud. It is now nobody's salientian Memphis, but properly palatial. The greats need no longer walk by potted palms as they do away with each other. It is nice and sinister, with a new photographic, constantly mutating background.

The programme notes, always comprehensive when it comes to *Aida*, name a positive plethora of luminaries, the most important being Zouari Marzouk and Mohamed El-Gharbawi, set designers, and the lighting designer, Alaa El-Din Mostafa. There is, unfortunately, no mention of the costume designer, which in this production is something of a shame.

The music for *Aida* can be bent and twisted at will, but it is high Verdi and no

circus. Mustafa shows no special love for *Aida*, which is sad because it does go on for ever and a little love does help the hours to pass. He plods, he puffs and blows but no part of it ever, even in the wonderful pianissimo aria, shows involvement or imagination. Straight always, and too loud.

The singers are exposed to shocking decisions. Two new singers, Rebecca Semrau as Aida, and Hanan El-Guindy, as Amneris, were making their house debut, and received little help. Nagui's caustic tempi made for awkward listening.

Act I introduced the new American tenor Timothy Myssard as Radames. He is a robusto, with a solid voice, but seems ill-suited to the high tessitura of Radames. He made a staunch victim for the mummification process and gave an impression of power. He was always into the story. There are hopes for a new king in *Ballo in Maschera*.

Roda El-Wakil is no stranger to the opera here, though his commitments abroad made him an infrequent visitor. He has a voice of beauty, and the stature to match. His High Priest, if not quite villainous, is an impossible nut for Amneris to crack. Gaber El-Beltagi as Aida's father has a true Verdi baritone, and the presence to go with it. The lion skins were not needed.

In these two performances the roles change faces. The first *Aida* had Awaafet El-Sharkawi as Amneris. She is excellent at suggesting an involved, unhappy woman. She moves along, dignified and lost, observing the scene as a hostess soprano, and she managed the third act without a hitch.

Le Ballet du Nord; Al-Gomhouriya Theatre, 23 & 24 October

If you are a hard-line feminist you will not have a dry stone's worth of sympathy for Giselle and her legendary Willes. But in this production the phantoms are women, and once a phantom always a phantom. This ballet, presented by Le

Ballet du Nord, was great fun.

The original music by Adams was called *Giselle*, after the heroine of one of the big theatre works of the 19th century. It set fashions in philosophy, and epitomised the entire Romantic era. Like its relative, the opera *Norma*, it set its stamp on its chosen genre for all time. *Giselle* was ballet, a mad and unbeatable creation which has lasted till now. It begins as a weepy but ends as a creepy. And in Act II, when Giselle abandoned by her prince, she and her vengeful band of gravehoppers, Heine's Willes, dance the prince to death.

This version of *Giselle* has a symmetry comparable to the original but that is the end of compromise. If you and your children have been going to *Giselle* for years, you will have seen nothing like this.

Made by choreographer Maryse Delente, and danced by the wonderful Ballet du Nord, it is not dance theatre but pure dance itself. Maybe this is the best new ballet seen here for years. Never does it smirk, giggle or denigrate the old, stuffed original. Rather it retakes the idea of *Giselle* and gives the astounded viewer such perfectly imagined images and choreographed work cuts that it is barely possible to take it all in a single showing.

The story takes off where earlier *Giselle*s end: she is dead and buried and his highness, guilty, is alive. But in this show he is dead. There are no men in this ballet at all. Only women, in a rather aggressive and vengeful mood. Willes don't die, they go on jumping, mostly out of graves. It must be fun, because these female Willes are frisky. The recorded score does justice to an exceptional understanding of the music. The dramatic build-up to the great fears of the original are more exciting than ever. Giselle, dead or alive, dances.

The new version begins its own long jump from the tomb. There are nine dancers who never leave the stage. They go on through every imaginable species of movement, including ironic cabaret. But they are always uneasily, never commonplace. The wit demanded by the choreographer is piquant, and it is delivered.

This ballet is a model lesson in sending dance into the next century.

And in the end, are these phantoms weary? No way.

Fair To Macho muscle lumps Having a lovely time in purgatory. Don't bother to come down. Lovely with you.

The tomb is zipped up. The ballet ends.

Ghad theatre this month in a production directed by Zosar Marzouk, a stage-designer turned director. There was the usual amount of cutting and hacking of the text one has come to expect in all productions nowadays, and the usual quota of songs, incidental music and sound effects — all recorded and played voice-over. Recorded music in any performance is bad enough, but in the case of *Al-Fahlawan*, it was lethal, and rather than use the original songs, Al-Deweri derived from popular sources, the director opted for a songwriter who provided lyrics which, though very good in themselves, ran contrary to the mood of the piece. For the title role he chose Asifat Abdel-Gaffar, a very competent actor indeed, but in terms of age and style miscast in this role. In the second part of the performance (which starts with *Magamat* number three) Marzouk went out of his way to play up the melodrama which made the top merchants and businessmen of the city.

Such vivid, colourful theatricality is not uncommon in the writing of Al-Deweri in general. And when it is not implied in the dialogue, it is indicated by voluminous stage directions. This makes many of his plays read like film scripts and he occasionally alludes to his texts as 'scenics' for performance. Perhaps this is only to be expected, since Al-Deweri is also a theatre director of long standing, and as such tends primarily to images. What it ultimately calls into question is not the possibility of the hero's redemption, but the romantic concept of the popular hero as such — as charming rogue, kindly outlaw, honest highwayman and lusty womaniser. Our folk tales, sagas and *Sirous* are full of such heroes and I think it is about time someone took a long, hard look at them and gave us a different reading of their characters.

With a highly theatrical hero, given to self-dramatisation and endless yarn-spinning, it was natural for Al-Deweri's two remaining plays to follow the narrative line for Al-Deweri's two remaining plays. *Al-Fahlawan* premiered at Al-

Al-Ghad hall, while *Magamat*

was staged at the Alexandria Conference Centre.

Al-Deweri's plays are

not to be missed.

Al-Deweri's plays are

Speaking many tongues?

Understanding Arabic, ed Alaa El-Gibali; AUC Press, Cairo, 1996

Fifteen scholars, many of them well-known experts in linguistics, have — under the editorship of Professor Alaa El-Gibali — synthesised, criticised, and extended our understanding of Arabic in a volume that is, appropriately enough, dedicated to Professor El-Said Badawi.

"In Badawi," writes the editor of the present volume, "we have an Arab — motives indisputably genuine, ties to the classical heritage unrelenting and intimate, and proficiencly trained in modern linguistics — who concedes the actuality and bona fide theoretical status of the colloquial varieties, the true native tongues of the Arab dawî."

The main thesis of the book is that it was never true that Arabic had been unchanging. The writers contend that Arabic has changed to the extent that we have different Arab languages. In other words, Arabic, like Latin, gave birth to French, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese. Classical Arabic gave birth to Saudi, Egyptian, Tunisian, etc. What is more interesting is that the Egyptian language is now breaking up in to Cairo, Alexandria, and so on. If this thesis is true then the book is in my view bone fide an Orientalist effort to destroy Arabic.

Michael Carter, in his paper, tries to present evidence of changes within the structure of Arabic in its spoken Egyptian form, with special attention to those that may become permanent in the language as a whole. Emphasis is placed upon what seems to be spontaneous internal changes in the system, that is, changes that are not an obvious response to contact with other languages.

Kassim M. Webha offers a study of the social stratification of Arabic in Alexandria. He takes Labov's study of the social stratification of English in New York to explain language variation in Arabic. He investigates variation of the spoken language in Alexandria, using a quantitative sociolinguistic methodology, and reports on how the modulation of a phonetic variable such as emphasis is related to social differences among speakers in a diglossic community.

Benjamin Harry advances in his paper a model of a multi-glossic continuum in Arabic and shows how speakers shift along it according to several variables. He also reports on an experiment with Egyptian native speakers that points to the regularity of the varieties on the continuum, which may lead to the possibility of writing a unified grammar for all the varieties of Arabic.

Dionisios A. Agius discusses the Sicilian *jarid* (registers) and their linguistic impact on Sicilian Arabic. These documents, covering the period from 1091 to 1266, provide information on estates and land property as well as on the inhabitants who worked for their lords in the allocated territories. They are mostly in Greek, though some are in Arabic or in parallel Arabic and Greek or Arabic and Latin. The data covers information on grain, vines, trees, woodlands, water rights, stock-raising, vegetable fibres, floral commodities, communications, and so on. The anthroponyms found in these registers suggest how their betters made their living. The material does have defects: for the lexicographer it lacks data on sex ratios etc.

In recent years, there has been a shift of focus in studying Arabic. Gone are the days when Arabs were considered Bedouins living in isolated deserts, their history reduced to what happened under the four Caliphs. In today's world the Arabs are an integral part of the international community, and so is the language they speak.

Kees Versteegh (Chapter 11) puts us on the right path as he investigates in depth the cyclical relationship of influence between attitudes towards the Arabic language and the formulation of 'Arab grammarians' theories about the origin of speech. Arabic, like any other natural language, has evolved throughout its long history, but its traditional prescriptive mode of study has remained relatively unchanged and has continued to dominate the investigation of the language for some 15 centuries. It has been perceived by Arabs and many Arabophones and Arabophiles as a language immune to change on account of its intimate link with Islam; consequently, new ideas, findings, and approaches of modern linguistics have been routinely dismissed as irrelevant.

Thus, in recent years, there has been a shift of focus from Teaching Arabic as an Foreign Language (TAFL) at the university level, at least in the West. Many stu-

dents, university administrators, and decision-makers have pushed for a change. They have argued for supplementing, if not replacing, the traditional philological programmes (where Arabic is taught either as a means for reading texts or as a linguistic system per se) with more communicative programmes, where the focus is not only on reading but also on speaking, listening and writing skills.

Students of Arabic sociolinguistics will always be obliged to Professor Badawi for his monumental study, *Mastanqat Al-Arabiya Al-Masriya fi Misr*, a shock that demonstrates as clearly as any why languages should be studied within the framework of their social and cultural context.

Badawi posits five levels in contemporary Egyptian Arabic, based on his study of the oral use of Arabic in the Egyptian media in the 1960s.

Blanc had already defined five levels of style in a cross-dialectal situation (1960), but unlike Blanc, who defined his levels within a purely grammatical framework, Badawi does so sociolinguistically. Only after establishing his sociolinguistic levels does Badawi list the different linguistic features of each level — *fusha al-turath* "classical Arabic of the heritage"; *fusha al-azr* "contemporary classical Arabic"; *amayyat al-muthaqqa* "colloquial of the educated"; *amayyat al-mutanaqqa* "colloquial of the enlightened"; *amayyat al-ummiyyin* "colloquial of the illiterate".

Badawi emphasises that his analysis of oral Arabic in Egypt is based on sociolinguistic factors, since it predicts which level a group of people will use in certain situations. He claims that his levels are not real, that the dividing lines between them are imaginary, and that one cannot decide where a level starts and where it ends. He proposes the levels as a heuristic device to be used in the study of sociolinguistic and linguistic features. Yet by assigning linguistic characteristics to these levels, Badawi cannot escape the impression others draw that these specific levels do exist as neat categories. Furthermore, by assigning each level a name, Badawi is forced to draw a dividing line between the standard and the colloquial varieties.

The interaction between dialect and cultural elements is now more accessible with the *Dictionary of Egyptian Arabic*, which goes beyond a mere listing of words by including speech genres and a mix of cultural information. Likewise, valuable ethnographic accounts of local cultures such as Lane's *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* or Ahmed Amin's *Qamus Al-Adab wa-l-Taqallib Al-Misriyya* can now be better correlated with partial dialect descriptions like Mahmoud Tammam's *Al-Amthal Al-Misriyya* to enhance our understanding of the contemporary sociolinguistic experience.

One of the amazing aspects of Arabic for the empirical linguist who takes real native speakers seriously is that most educated native speakers appear to reside in the middle of a diglossic continuum, rather than at either or both ends. It is difficult to find contemporary examples of "pure" colloquial, uninfluenced by the literary language, or by Western modes of expression, and it is even more difficult to find examples of the pure literary language, *fusha*, uninfluenced by the spoken language and by Western modes of expression. Speakers themselves are very aware of the source of their linguistic material, and can tell you if a particular lexical item, grammatical pattern, or even vowel marker, is dialectal



Carved in tablets of stone? Not quite, as this 9th century manuscript shows. And if it is not quite the language spoken by 12th century Sicilians Arabic, *Understanding Arabic* will tell you why.

or *fusha*. In other words, speakers are acutely aware of the diglossic nature of their language situation, and of the two varieties that make up this situation. However, when they actually produce language, be it spoken or written, the overwhelming tendency is to produce language that falls somewhere between the two.

Nabil M. A. Abd-El-Fattah argues that newspaper language need not be viewed with suspicion, as a source of destruction of Classical Arabic. It should be viewed instead as a valuable source of linguistic data on the current changes taking place in Modern Standard Arabic. Systematic analysis of newspaper language would be beneficial not only to descriptive studies of Arabic but also to teachers of Arabic as a foreign language, when their students wish to study the Arabic of today rather than the language of past generations.

In the context of Egyptian journalism, Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is used to relay current events and commentaries to readers in a linguistic medium that is essentially neutral, simple, yet expressive and communicative. It is these characteristics that set journalistic writing apart from other forms of writing. Even though journalistic language shares some of the characteristics of scientific and literary writing, it is not as specific and dry as the former, nor as aesthetic and metaphorical as the latter, and is essentially employed for pragmatic and social rather than for literary or scientific pragmatics (Hamza 1961).

Scientific and literary language, on the other hand, share some, but not all of the

functions and features of journalistic language. The former shares with journalistic language its concern for factuality, while the latter shares its concern for style.

Most new writing today follows what is commonly known in journalistic jargon as the "inverted pyramid" method, which dictates that any story be presented in paragraphs with the most important elements in the top paragraph followed by the remaining paragraphs in an order of descending importance. This form of writing, as Anderson and Irule state, "puts the climax of a story at the beginning, in the head". The adoption of this method in Egyptian journalism in the 1950s in the hands of the founders of *Akhbar El-Yom* newspaper, Ali and Mustafa Amin, reflected a marked change in the philosophy of journalistic writing. Prior to the appearance of *Akhbar El-Yom*, reporters sought to keep their readers in suspense for the longest time possible by holding the crucial details until the end of the report.

However, the book is a qualitative description of language variation, but it must be followed by interpretive that may be applied in explaining language behaviour in the Egyptian community. We hope more studies will be made to elaborate a taxonomy of language situations, and that ultimately, that taxonomy will be replaced by a consistent frame of reference in which this kind of thinking about language and this kind of research might be done.

Reviewed by M. Shebl El-Komy

Nasser's Blessed Movement: Egypt's Free Officers and the July Revolution,
Joel Gordon, AUC Press, Cairo, 1996

Tripping on the middle ground

This is not bedtime reading. Focusing on what he describes as "the transitional period from coup d'état to revolution" Joel Gordon has taken upon himself the task of reinterpreting the first years of the Egyptian revolution of 1952. And as with any historical analysis which rests on very distinct theoretical parameters, his argument works only if you accept all the facets of the theory he meticulously constructs — should the reader be so bold as to temper with a single aspect of his argument the whole edifice becomes shifty and unconvincing.

Under Nasser, the military regime launched an ambitious programme of political, social and economic reform. Egypt became a leader in Arab and non-aligned politics, as well as a model for political mobilisation and national development throughout the Third World. According to the author, this historical legacy often diverts attention away from the early years of the revolution itself, a period of transition in which Nasser and his colleagues groped for direction. Gordon tries to differentiate his work from the plethora of studies on the revolution, by offering his own version of "how the regime solidified its hold over the state and the effect that process, the political revolution, had on a nascent social revolution". His complex account of the characters and events of the period are supported by interviews with parti-

cipants and observers of the incident's described.

Gordon goes to great lengths to justify his choice of topic: he sees the political debate in Egypt today as coloured by the ongoing debate about the aims and successes of the Free Officers, as the nation strives to rediscover its past in formulating policies for the future. This is why the early years of the revolution are so important: according to Gordon, an understanding of the revolution, and of the shape and content of Egyptian political life under Sadat, and subsequently Mubarak, requires a re-evaluation of the decay of liberalism prior to revolution, and of the Neoliberal values the officers came to propound in the course of their years in power. Through his analysis of the period, he attempts to answer questions such as "What options did Egypt's political leaders promote to the old regime?" and "Did the officers have a pre-conceived political agenda?"

But, though well researched, and certainly well-formulated, something is missing from the study. For starters, Gordon never clearly defines his terminology. Even his use of the term 'revolution' is never conclusively explained. Throughout the book he steers a wavering middle course between a Marxist perspective and its sometime antithesis, the supposedly 'realist' power politics expounded by celebrity statesmen such as Kissinger.

The former views revolutions as the 'locomotive of history', the inevitable transition that propels the world from one historical era and economic system to another. Individuals may act in a revolution, but they do not create the conditions for social upheaval — they are instead the beneficiaries of a wave of change which they ride to achieve their ends. The alternative perspective views revolutions not as the inevitable evolution of historical and economic factors, but as the work of power-seeking individuals, who subvert the system and create chaos to satisfy their own Machiavellian ends.

What remains so disconcerting to the reader is that Gordon's book attempts to incorporate both traditions in what turns out to be a rather uneasy union.

For him the Free Officers both did and did not bring about the July Revolution of 1952. Though the Free Officers are at the centre of his study, he rejects theories that depict their role as inevitable: "It is too often taken for granted that Egypt stood on the brink of social revolution, and that if the Free Officers' sake were not inevitable, their assumption of absolute power was." He condemns this as the product of hindsight and the retelling of history by the officers once in power. For him the revolution was a much more haphazard affair, "a military coup organised by junior officers with unfocused

goals and limited ambitions which became over the course of the following decade a revolution from above that transformed Egyptian society and reorientated the way Egyptians look at themselves and the world".

At the same time, he argues that the officers should not be at the centre of the debate. The failure of the old regime was also "the result of external factors... And among the external factors he cites is the well-documented background role of the foreign powers.

In spite of incongruities this book should (and does) form a staple ingredient of any academic booklist, as a supplement to students interested in the politics and the history of the region. Characterising the transition period as "one of experimentation, groping, and shifting alliances", the book focuses in detail on the complex manoeuvring between military and civilians during the first two years of military rule. But that is exactly the problem. To the lay reader with only a sketchy understanding of events, this book becomes confusing. The wealth of detail, though informative, often obscures the bigger picture. Gordon's book preaches to the converted — it is no introduction to first time readers.

Reviewed by Yasmin Allam

Festival of Arabic Music, 1-10 Nov: Programme



Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira Tel 341 2926.

1 Nov, 8pm.

Traditional Oriental songs: lyrics by Muftah Mahmud (Egypt), music by Tewfik Al-Basha (Lebanon), conducted by Muftah Nagui (Egypt); with the Cairo Symphony Orchestra and the Cairo Opera Choir. Musical interlude: Mohamed El-Hefny, with the Arabic Music Ensemble, conducted by Salah Ghobash (Egypt).

2 Nov, 8pm.

Tarshish Oriental Music Troupe (Greece), conducted by Nessim Dakour. The Alawia Troupe (Morocco). The National Arabic Music Ensemble, conducted by Selim Sabah (Egypt). Musical interlude: Reem Khamal (Syria) and Elias Karim (Syria).

3 Nov, 8pm.

The Arabic Music Professors' Syndicate Troupe (Syria), conducted by Mohamed Al-Hamdi. Musical interlude: Khalid Ben Houssein and Ghada perform music by Youssef Al-Mehme (Kuwait). The Amaya Sharara Sextet (Egypt). Musical interlude: Ghada Ragab (Egypt) and Saber Al-Roba'i (Tunisia).

4 Nov, 8pm.

The Conservatoire Orchestra: concerto for violin and orchestra, composed by Atteya Sharara, soloist Hassan Sharara (Egypt).

5 Nov, 8pm.

Mohamed Abdel-Wahab Troupe, conducted by Qadri Sourou (Egypt), Abu Sherif (Morocco). Nour El-Hussein Ensemble for Arabic Music (Jordan). Musical interlude: Ali Abd-Kerim (Saudi Arabia) and Hayat Al-Jidris (Morocco).

6 Nov, 8pm.

Songs by Sabah Fakhry (Syria).

7 Nov, 8pm.

Sabri Midhat Troupe (Syria). Arabic Music Ensemble, conducted by Salah Ghobash (Egypt). Musical interlude: Elias Karam (Syria) and Nagah Sallam (Lebanon) with the Arabic Music Ensemble (Egypt).

8 Nov, 8pm.

Songs by Sabah Fakhry (Syria).

9 Nov, 8pm.

Mohamed Abdel-Wahab Troupe, conducted by Qadri Sourou (Egypt), Abu Sherif (Morocco). Nour El-Hussein Ensemble for Arabic Music (Jordan). Musical interlude: Hani Shaker (Egypt).

10 Nov, 8pm.

National Arabic Music Ensemble, conducted by Selim Sabah (Egypt). Arabic Music Ensemble, conducted by Salah Ghobash (Egypt). Musical interlude: Hani Shaker (Egypt).

11 Nov, 8pm.

Gomhouria Theatre, Gomhouria St Tel 341 2926.

2 Nov, 8pm.

Al-Woudaia Troupe for Andalusian Music (Algeria). Arabic Music Ensemble, conducted by Noureddin Al-Bali (Tunisia).

3 Nov, 8pm.

Leila Ali (Morocco) and Noureddin Al-Bali (Tunisia). Traditional Oriental songs: compositions by Atteya Sharara, vocals by Nafisa.

4 Nov, 8pm.

Sabri Midhat Troupe (Syria). Musical interlude: Leila Ali (Morocco) and Noureddin Al-Bali (Tunisia).

5 Nov, 8pm.

Songs by Atteya Sharara.

6 Nov, 8pm.

Traditional Music (Iraq). Musical interlude: Ahmed Ibrahim (Egypt).

Small Hall, Opera House, Gezira Tel 341 2926.

2 Nov, 5.30pm.

Oud recital by Mourad Bashir.

4 Nov, 5.30pm.

Children's Choir Troupe, The Suzuki Ensemble for violin (Egypt).

5 Nov, 5.30pm.

The Wedadiya Troupe for Andalusian Music (Algeria).

6 Nov, 5.30pm.

Panel discussion on the works of Mahmoud Ahmed El-Hefni, to mark his centenary.

Pan chair Samia El-Khalil (Egypt).

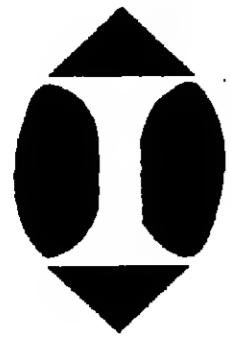
7 Nov, 5.30pm.

Lecture by Gamal Badr Khamsi Al-Shidi: The Role of The Oman Traditional Music Centre in the Conservation of Musical Heritage. The lecturer is the director of the centre.

Lecture by Bassam Al-Mallak: Omani Music as a Discipline. The lecturer is the centre's advisor and professor of Ethnic Music, Munich University (Oman).

Plain Talk

During my recent visit to London I asked the British Council to arrange meetings with organisations involved in children's literature, a domain of writing that has always interested me. So they did, and I had the pleasure of being introduced to a number of people, either writing for children, or advising on the right books to read.



Inter-Continental Hotels and Resorts celebrates 5 decades of excellence



Fifty years of innovation and expertise

1996 marks the 50th anniversary for Inter-Continental Hotels and Resorts worldwide in two spectacular gala evenings, Inter-Continental Hotels and resorts Middle East and Africa and the Semiramis Inter-Continental celebrated "Five Decades of Excellence" at the hotel.

Over 800 guests from 17 countries in the Middle East and Africa were welcomed by Mr and Mrs Raymond Khalife, president of Inter-Continental Resorts Middle East and North Africa, and Mr and Mrs Hans Werner Oberitz, regional vice-president operations Egypt and general manager, Semiramis Inter-Continental.

Raymond Khalife started the evening off with a note of thanks to all guests for their continued support and patronage, followed by an exciting presentation given by an Inter-Continental area executive which took the audience

through landmark events that happened to Inter-Continental Hotels and Resorts between 1946 and 1996.

Highlights of these spectacular events were world-renown Alex and Craig, Linda Flemming, Talaat Zein and famous Oriental belly-dancer Dina.

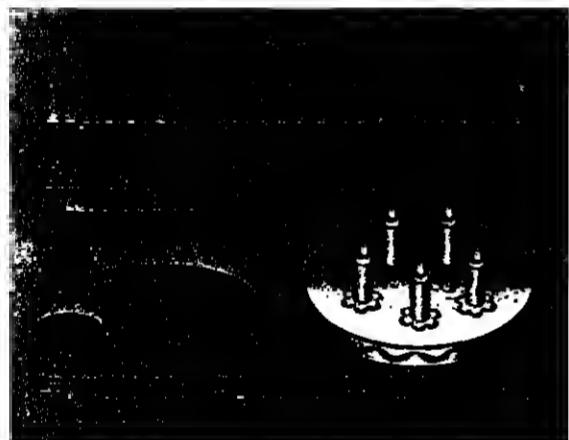
As an end-note the staff of the Semiramis Inter-Continental joined the guests in a celebration with a 50th anniversary parade, a birthday cake and a big Thank You bouquet of balloons.

Inter-Continental today has 190 hotels in 67 countries with plans to have more than 200 Inter-Continental and Forum International Hotels and 100 global partner hotels by the year 2000, and will no doubt continue on its surge to serve the 21st century guests. With 50 years of innovation and expertise, Inter-Continental will be there to provide, well into the millennium.



World-renowned entertainer Alex joins in the 50th anniversary celebrations

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Mr Raymond Khalife, president of Inter-Continental Hotels and Resorts, Middle East and North Africa, and Mr Hans Werner Oberitz, regional vice-president operations Egypt and general manager, Semiramis Inter-Continental, cutting the 50th anniversary cake



Mr. Raymond Khalife, president of Inter-Continental Hotels and Resorts, Middle East and North Africa, amidst Intercontinental senior executives; Mr. Alfonz Maloschik, regional vice-president operations East Africa and general manager Nairobi Inter-Continental, Mr. Ahmed Ramadhan, regional director of operations UAE and general manager, Dar Al-Continental, Mr. Hans Werner Oberitz, regional vice-president operations Egypt and general manager, Semiramis Inter-Continental, Mr. Johnny Fattah, regional vice-president operations Sandi Arabic and general manager Jeddah Inter-Continental, Mr. Anthony Liddiard, area vice-president, sales and marketing, Middle East and Africa and Mr. Roger Keats, regional vice-president operations West Africa and general manager of Ivoire Inter-Continental Abidjan cutting the 50th anniversary cake

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مكتبة من الأصل

The earth trembled for only one minute, and thousands of lives were changed forever. But how? Four years later, Mariz Tadros explores the answer



The '93 tremor brought down apartment buildings like so many card houses, destroyed ancient places of worship and new places of learning. Tent camps became home for thousands of victims

Earthquake: four years after

For *Umm Amr*, being a single parent with three children was hard enough — the last thing she needed was an earthquake to jolt her family's already precarious existence. "My husband left me eight years ago to marry a younger woman. I haven't seen him since, although I bear him doing well. He hasn't spent a penny on his children since he left," she said.

When the earth shook for a minute in Cairo at 3:14pm, on 12 October 1992, *Umm Amr*'s husband was living in a solid home in Imbaba. But the mother of three lost her home and eventually had to struggle to find somewhere to live. Even though *Umm Amr* was repeatedly told that her place in Boulaq El-Dakrout was unfit to live in because the earthquake had weakened its walls, she and her children continued to live there for over a year until they were relocated to a new one-bedroom unit in El-Nahda, 15km northeast of Cairo.

Umm Amr and her children are one of thousands of families in Greater Cairo displaced by the earthquake and rehoused by the government in seven settlement areas including Qatana, Dweka, El-Nahda, El-Ayyat, Manshiyat El-Bakri, Mughattam and Ain Helwan.

"We were very lucky that when the earthquake happened, leaving thousands on the streets, we had vacant low-cost housing blocks. These were initially built for new university graduates and newlyweds," explained Yousef Hassan, under-secretary of the housing and utilities department for Cairo Governorate. There are three main settlement complexes in Cairo — El-Nahda, Mughattam, and Ain Helwan — he added.

Four years after the earthquake, Hassan admits that not all displaced families in Cairo have been resettled yet: "For a while the construction of new buildings stopped because the contractors had claims on the government which were long overdue. But the government has resolved this problem and over the last six months, more homes have been built. The last 2,000 displaced families will be resettled in El-Nahda and Mughattam by December at the latest."

However, even for those who received their units shortly after the earthquake, there is still some ambiguity about how much of the cost they will have to bear. For *Umm Amr* and many like her, the issue of rent is very distressing. Working full-time as a house cleaner, the change of location meant that she could no longer work for the same households in the heart of Cairo and nobody in her new neighbourhood could afford a cleaner.

The Red Crescent unit in El-Nahda offered her a job two years ago. She earns LE90 monthly — out of which she has to pay LE30 for rent. The rest of her salary must be stretched as far as possible to cover her children's school tuition and food expenses.

"I heard rumours I will have to start paying back rent for the first few months which I thought were free. I can't afford it, unless we all go without food. Will they throw me out if I can't pay?" *Umm Amr* demanded.

Hassan denied the possibility: "Nobody will be forced to leave their homes. We have not thrown anybody out and this is an unlikely scenario. Can you imagine the public reaction if we threw some-

ones out because they were too poor to pay?" He also denied accusations that some residents are now being asked to pay instalments as high as LE1,000 for the first months in which they paid no rent.

The People's Assembly decided that instalments should be paid over a period of 40 instead of 30 years, with the same interest rate of 6 per cent and they increased the housing loan to LE14,000 per unit," he added: "In the end, don't forget they have brand new homes they would never have dreamt of before. The day the units were being handed out to El-Nahda, you could hear women ululating, many of whom had been living in slum conditions before."

Slum or no slum, alternative housing is still, if anything, a mixed blessing for the majority. On the bright side, millions of pounds were poured into making their new habitat as comprehensive as services as is realistically possible. El-Nahda and Ain Helwan, for instance, were chosen as pilot community development projects by the government and UNICEF. In El-Nahda, the Egyptian Red Crescent was involved in resettling over 42,000 people and at Ain Helwan, the Integrated Care Society, a non-governmental organisation chaired by Suzanne Mubarak, helped resettle 30,000 people.

Hoda Barakat, general manager of the Egyptian Red Crescent Society, explained that a few weeks after the earthquake, the society was suddenly confronted with the task of settling low-income families from more than 13 different poor and unplanned districts across Cairo to the remote area of El-Nahda.

"In the beginning, there was no infrastructure, not

all the units were ready, there were no roads, no services or facilities and no transport to and from El-Nahda," recalls Barakat.

Within a short period of time, the Red Crescent helped open three markets, a post office and helped distribute over 150 commercial shops to local inhabitants... According to a survey, the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM) conducted at El-Nahda, 52 per cent of families have a monthly income less than LE200. The majority of new settlers had no regular jobs, skills or trade.

The psychological and social turmoil of being suddenly uprooted from one's community of family and friends was as draining as the lack of a solid income. Aida Guindy, member of the executive board of the Integrated Care Society and former UNICEF director for Europe and Africa, was a key player in mobilising community development and cooperation at Ain Helwan. Inaugurated by Suzanne Mubarak in early 1993, Ain Helwan received an award as one of the top 10 urban development projects at the United Nations Habitat II conference held in Turkey last year.

Without a network of friends and neighbours, a new residence would never become home. "For many families, it took over two years to settle down. Some chose to go and live with relatives instead. Some received their apartments but wouldn't live in them. The losses were tremendous — even if it was just an old mattress or a rickety chair or a family bed," said Guindy.

Many felt isolated, bitter and dispirited. "But we still wanted to promote the concept of participation — it is their community; they must be involved in

the planning and execution of any programme; they must participate in the decision-making process," she asserted.

Practically, that meant the election of a cluster leader for every building to communicate, discuss and express the interests of his block. Out of 14 cluster leaders in Ain Helwan, 12 are women. Cluster leaders gather every fortnight for a neighbourhood committee meeting and are elected by the residents annually.

The idea, explained Guindy, was "to empower the community to identify and put forward their own suggestions about how to deal with their most pressing problems." Social clubs for women, the elderly, the disabled and children were set up, to foster a feeling of togetherness. Community initiatives ranging from literacy classes, to the ABCs of electricity and plumbing, environmental protection, legal advice, health and prenatal care all targeted women, especially female-headed households like those of *Umm Amr*.

Female-headed households constitute 25 per cent of all families in El-Nahda and 20 per cent in Ain Helwan. Many families were torn apart by the earthquake — some men, having lost their residence, remarried a woman from the neighbourhood so that they wouldn't have to move out. "But now we worry about unemployment amongst the youth which is as high as 40 per cent in Ain Helwan," said Guindy. "The men come to us and tell us that we are concentrating on women and children and not paying sufficient attention to their economic needs. We still have to look into the economic development of our community more creatively."

Trying times

If KHALED Hassan is renowned in sports circles for being the first disabled swimmer to cross the English Channel, he is better known amongst residents of El-Nahda for having been there with them from the beginning. It all started when Hassan was summoned by the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports to work their branch in El-Salam City, a new Cairo satellite development, 15km northeast of the capital.

Coincidentally that was the year of the 1992 earthquake and a camp site was set up in the city for displaced families. Tents were provided for 150 families while another 150 were accommodated in the gymnasium courts. For 40 days, Hassan did not go back home to visit his family once. He worked from dawn till late at night. To help register around 1,500 persons from districts including Old Cairo, Shubra, El-Gamaleya and El-Sharabiya, an action group of 15 youths, including Hassan, was mobilised.

"We were especially worried

about security at that point. Although the army and police were there, we were scared that unchecked food supplies would spread around the camps. The Egyptian Red Crescent arrived soon after the tents were drawn — food, medicine and blankets were distributed," Hassan recalled.

Now the burden of his household is greater than before: "Often I have to pay LE1.50 to get to work because I'm forced to take a microbus since the bus is so crammed." Mohamed makes LE6-7 a day, LE3 of which is for transport. Consequently, the left-over money to feed the family of seven is not enough.

And, according to Hossneya, the problems don't end there: "I can't buy my household needs from here, everything is too expensive and the bread doesn't taste nice. Besides, I'm used to doing my shopping in El-Azhar."

Mohamed's children will undoubtedly grow up in a nicer flat, in a clean, new district, but their parents will continue to find difficulty in adjusting to this new life — and all the additional costs it entails.



Hassan: a four-year commitment

for almost 6 months after families were resettled in El-Nahda, Hassan also moved with the families to El-Nahda, this time under the umbrella of the Red Crescent.

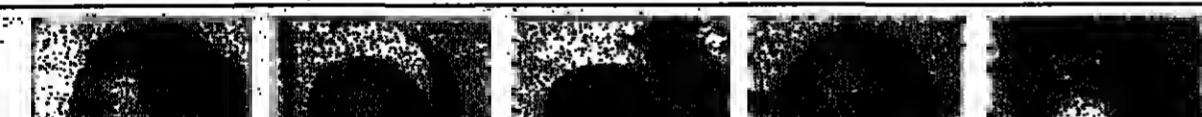
"Whenever a gas cylinder seller used to pass by banging on a cylinder to call buyers, many would rush to their windows in distress, wondering whether it was an earthquake warning," he said. It was the first year that was particularly difficult for everyone, recounted Hassan. There were no street lights, no roads, no transport and worse, everybody felt alien to the place.

"When the local government was distributing the units, they did not have time to place people from the same area together — bear in mind that the customs, habits and way of living for a family from Shubra El-Kheima are very different from those of El-Sayedas Zeinab. They all ended up being clumped together and rivalries started between families from different districts to see which one can impose its order on the others," said Hassan.

"You just didn't know who your neighbour was — if you had girls, then you automatically became suspicious of your neighbour's sons. So many families ended up locking themselves in their own unit without wanting to have anything to do with the rest," he explained.

Hassan believes that the elderly suffered the most. Sons and daughters who had families of their own units refused to move all the way to El-Nahda just to keep their parents company. At the same time many did not have enough space to accommodate their parents in their own homes.

"One winter night last year I was patrolling the neighbourhood when I saw this 70-year-old woman sleeping on a piece of cardboard. Her children had abandoned her and she had lost all her belongings in the earthquake," Hassan recounted. "In other cases, neighbours would discover that an elderly man or woman has been dead for four or five days without anybody knowing."



Starting from scratch

"We are trying to live, but I can't say we are really living — at least not like before," said Ali Abdel-Magid, speaking from his modest new apartment in El-Nahda, 15 kilometres northeast of Cairo. Before the 1992 earthquake, Abdel-Magid, his wife Yomna, and their six children lived in an old 5-bedroom flat in the lower-middle class Cairo district of El-Sayeda Zeinab. When the earthquake hit, Abdel-Magid was at work and Yomna was cooking lunch. "I grabbed the children and just ran. I could feel the stairs crumbling under my feet," Yomna recalled. Within minutes, the whole building had tumbled to the ground.

"My life savings were lost in a moment under the rubble," lamented Abdel-Magid. Pointing to his virtually toothless mouth, he added, "I got dental braces immediately afterwards and my teeth fell out."

Abdel-Magid, 60, painted houses for 14 years in Kuwait. "My dream was to give my children the best life possible. I wanted them to have a comfortable home. You should have visited my place before the earthquake. Oh, it was exquisite — the nicest furniture and lots of household appliances. I didn't want my family to want for anything, so I worked day and night to save every paise," he said.

During those 14 years, Abdel-Magid did save a total of LE80,000. But it was all buried in the earthquake. The painter had also kept his

savings at home with his mother rather than in a bank because he wanted to make sure that when he travelled, his mother and sister would have immediate access to any amount of cash.

"My mother was old and sick and my sister had a heart condition — I had to make sure they would be taken care of. But I didn't know this would happen," he sighed. After the earthquake, Abdel-Magid returned with some workers to look for his money. But they found nothing but rubble.

The family finally moved to their new residence in El-Nahda after spending 40 days in a tent at a makeshift camp site in Sayeda Zeinab. "We had to start from scratch," explained Abdel-Magid. "I still haven't finished paying off the instalments for all the furniture you see here."

To pay off the remaining instalments, Abdel-Magid sells sandwiches. On average, his monthly earnings are around LE150 — LE70 of which is for rent. The rent for his old 5-bedroom apartment in Sayeda Zeinab was only LE6.

"I just can't face going back to Kobra to go up and down scaffolds anymore. I'm too old for that," he explained. With the help of the Red Crescent, Abdel-Magid has acquired a small shop where he plans to sell painting supplies. "I know I'll never be remotely compensated for my losses, even if I make a profit from the shop. On the other hand, my losses amount to nothing when I think that

my family came out unharmed," he said.

For 74-year-old Fadi Mohammed Ibrahim, and his wife Sitt Zoubah, the spacious, sunny, one-bedroom flat they have been given is a real dream home. Before the earthquake, they were living in a slum area of Dar El-Bassari, behind El-Imam El-Shafie Street in Al-Azhar district.

Ibrahim sold fried liver and occasionally watermelons, too. He and his wife managed to save their few belongings (a cupboard, table, bed and stove) before the entire building collapsed. "Of course, this is a much nicer place than the one we were living in. I like our new home," he said with satisfaction as his wife nodded in agreement.

Now the burden of his household is greater than before: "Often I have to pay LE1.50 to get to work because I'm forced to take a microbus since the bus is so crammed." Mohamed makes LE6-7 a day, LE3 of which is for transport. Consequently, the left-over money to feed the family of seven is not enough.

And, according to Hossneya, the problems don't end there: "I can't buy my household needs from here, everything is too expensive and the bread doesn't taste nice. Besides, I'm used to doing my shopping in El-Azhar."

Mohamed's children will undoubtedly grow up in a nicer flat, in a clean, new district, but their parents will continue to find difficulty in adjusting to this new life — and all the additional costs it entails.

Guides resist new technology

Electronic guiding is here to stay, but guides are apprehensive about its consequences. Rehab Saad reports on a hot controversy

The use of headphones in museums and at archaeological sites around the world is becoming increasingly common. In Egypt, however, even initial efforts to introduce them at the Cairo Museum are being met with resistance from tour guides who fear losing their jobs.

In a meeting last month of the general assembly of the Guides' Syndicate, "electronic guiding" was discussed for the first time. The advantages of the innovation include its ability to preclude the need for guides to shout at large groups of tourists. Thus, speaking into a microphone with each member of the group listening through a headphone, would reduce the level of noise in the museum.

The guides attending the meeting were unanimous in their dissent. They admitted that the use of tapes and headphones might be a facility to tourists, but they felt that they, the guides, would lose considerably.

The assembly insisted that whether or not the guides assembled, headphones were here to stay. Members pointed out that the use of this new technology, apart from reducing noise pollution in the museum and being a service to tourists, would have the added advantage of generating more income.

Nasry Iskandar of Cairo Museum pointed out that the use of tapes would not render a

guide useless. "Tapes outlining the history and giving details about an object would only be an added option available to tourists," he said.

Tourists themselves are generally in favour of using tapes. They say that the language standard on the tapes is higher than many guides', and therefore easier to understand. Also, many say that they do not have enough time to listen to a lot of details and would prefer to have a tape where they could control

However, since this is specifically designed for individuals, it is obviously unsuitable for Egypt's large group tours."

"Another type of headphone is like those worn by pilots," Qandil went on, "but these are cumbersome for tourists. A third mechanism, however, I feel is reasonable for use in Egypt. It is a small, lightweight apparatus used in many countries around the world. The tourists hold it and the guide speaks into a microphone. The main reason I am in favour of this is that it preserves the quality of the voice of the guide, makes his words audible to large groups and, at the same time, helps us keep abreast of modern technology."

"I am utterly against the use of this technology," said Ebab Farag, a conventional tour guide. "It would be a further waste of time for tourists who are already inconvenienced by the time taken to purchase tickets, place cameras and valuables in storage, etc. Another queue to hire a headphone will increase delays. At peak times, particularly in the

mornings, there are literally thousands of tourists, and it would be unrealistic to expect them to wait to collect a headphone," he explained. Farag estimated that if he had a group of 40 people and each took 30 seconds to hire the equipment, they would waste 20 extra minutes. "Every group would be delayed, and in my opinion, the time factor is very important in keeping tourists satisfied," he argued.

Ziad Anwar, another tour guide, felt that although the adoption of such technology abroad might be well organised, "here in Egypt it would be totally impracticable with such large numbers of tour groups and individual tourists."

One important fact that most guides agree on is that the use of headphones would result in a loss of personal contact, especially the important eye contact between the guide and the group.

Resistance to change is only to be expected. The tour guides are afraid of losing their jobs, but, as Qandil explains, "we cannot avoid change. When the computer was introduced people feared that it would lead to mass unemployment; when the satellite became available, people thought it would replace Egyptian TV; but both have come to stay, and we must also project our tourism image into the future."

Additional problems with the use of head-



A microphonic presentation to 50 tourists in Cairo Museum

photo: Sherif Sontbol

Personal communication between guide and visitors in Luxor

the amount and kind of information they receive.

The guides, however, are not convinced. Their reasoning is: How can the Syndicate and the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) guarantee that if they introduced headphones and microphones it would not lead to the replacement of guides?

And so, a controversy rages over the pros and cons of the new technology. The matter remains unsettled. Those in favour of the new technology include some members of the board of the Guides' Syndicate, Lyla Qandil, its head, pointed out that several types of headphones had been suggested by investors, and that she had found some totally unsuitable for use in Egypt. One particular type, however, she found appropriate. "The headphones I rejected is very popular at the Louvre," she said, "it is a small capsule, worn in the ear, containing all the necessary information about the monument being viewed. At the click of a button, the information is played.

Additional problems with the use of head-

phones were cited. Given the sensitivity of the equipment, it is bound to pick up not only the voice of the guide, but also all extraneous sounds from shuffling feet to coughing. Furthermore, many hygienically-minded tourists would be afraid of using them for fear of contracting diseases.

Yet despite the dissenting views of most of the tour guides, the Syndicate is moving toward the use of headphones, but no final decision has been made thus far.

One person in favour of this new technology is Se'fat Salema, who is both a tour guide and a member of the board of the Syndicate. She said, "Technological advances always face opposition, but tourists are already using headphones in this country. I feel that if the Syndicate owned these, we would be able to control the situation. If, on the other hand, it is left to the travel agencies, the whole situation may become beyond our control."

How to get there

Buses

Cairo-Nasriba
Service 8am, from Abbasiya, then Alaziza. Tickets deluxe bus LE53.

West Delta Bus Company

Stations at Tahrir and Alaziza. Tel. 243-3846.

Cairo-Hurghada

Services 9am, noon, 3pm, 10.30pm, 10.45pm and 11pm. Tickets LE50 one way.

Cairo-Safaga

Services 9am and 3pm. Tickets LE53 one way.

Cairo-Quseir

Services 9am. Tickets LE38 one way.

Cairo-Lazar

Service 9am. Tickets LE33 one way.

Cairo-Armenia

Services 5pm. Tickets LE50 one way.

Trains

Trains run to Alexandria, Port Said, Luxor and Arwan, from Ramsis Station. Tel. 147 or 575-3535.

Cairo-Luxor-Alexandria

"French" deluxe trains with sleepers. Services to Luxor and Arwan 6.40am and 9pm, Arwan 6.40am and 10am. Tickets LE19 for foreigners and LE12 for Egyptians, to Arwan LE30 for Egyptians, LE41 for foreigners.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh

Services 8am and 1pm, from Tahrir, then Giza and Alaziza. Departs Hurghada noon and 5pm. Tickets LE40 until 5pm; LE45 thereafter.

Alexandria-Hurghada

Services 8am, from Ramsis Square, Alexandria. Departs 5.30pm. Tickets LE60 each way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh

Services 8am, from Tahrir, then Giza and Alaziza. Departs Sharm El-Sheikh 11pm. Tickets LE50 each way.

EgyptAir

There are between two and five flights daily. Check flight times daily. Check-in desks: 8am-8.30pm, Opera 390-3444; or Hilton 72410.

Cairo-Armenia

Tickets LE33 or Egyptian, LE1143 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Lazar

Tickets LE35 for Egyptians, LE829 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Hurghada

Tickets LE279 for Egyptians, LE889 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh

Tickets LE287 for Egyptians, LE945 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Compiled by Rehab Saad

A bigger piece of the sky

Egypt and the Middle East still have a long way to go before they get their fair share of the international tourist market. Sherine Nasr investigates

Air traffic problems in Egypt and the lack of coordination between tourist countries in the Middle East were two focal points in a symposium on "Tourism between Europe and Africa through the Middle East". It was held during the International Arab Travel Market (IATM) conference in Cairo last week.

A heated discussion took place between local government representatives and Egyptian and foreign tourism experts on how Egypt and other Middle Eastern countries can obtain a larger share of the international tourist market. It focused on issues of open-sky policy, air monopoly, encouraging travellers in transit to visit Cairo and tourism promotion.

Nehad Gad, under-secretary for international tourism at the Egyptian Tourist Authority (ETA), said that Egypt has now implemented the open-sky policy formulated last February by cabinet decree. The decision has definitely increased the volume of air traffic through Egypt. By virtue of this decree, EgyptAir is now working at full capacity. "This decision could not have taken earlier because in 1992 the number of tourists dropped dramatically and it was expedient to protect the national air carrier from competition," she said. She explained that support of EgyptAir, the national air carrier, is part of the state's tourism promotion policy.

Gad's disclosure of the open-sky policy and relaxation of aviation regulations was strongly criticised by Benjamin Corbin, chairman of the Metropolitan Tourism Association. He argued that the government is still a long way from removing the protection EgyptAir is receiving. "I would have thought that the importance of tourism to Egypt far exceeds the mistaken belief that the national airline should be protected," he said.

Corbin criticised EgyptAir's monopoly of air traffic in Egypt as well as its unwillingness to compete with major international airlines for the benefit of tourists. "When competition does not exist, travellers have to take what's available. It is a common problem in Egypt and the Middle East," he said.

Fahim Rayan, chairman of EgyptAir, contends that it is only fair that tourists on package tours should be carried by the national airline. "Otherwise, we would be losing almost 25 to 40 per cent

of the total tour profit, and that is a great deal," Rayan said.

Many cities worldwide are potential tourist markets for Egypt, but are not serviced by EgyptAir. "This is a great loss for Egypt. Our plan is to identify these places and supply them with service, in order to avoid losing them," said Rayan.

According to tourism experts, airlines in Egypt and the Middle East should begin building alliances to obtain a larger portion of air traffic and also to provide more comprehensive services for tourists.

"Such an alliance can work only if different airlines agree that they should complement not compete with each other," said a tourism official.

The suggestion was not welcomed by Rayan who claimed that alliances can only be made between airlines sharing the same standards, types of services and safety.

"Alliances made with well-established airlines such as Lufthansa and British Airways are certain to destroy," he said. Rayan added that EgyptAir has, instead, market-sharing agreements with carriers such as Malaysia Airlines to carry passengers from the Far East to Europe through Egypt.

Corbin retorted that Rayan is using the same argument as all airlines, that they have to be protected by the big sharks in the industry. "It is a question of quantity, not quality," he said.

The latest statistics show that the Middle East has achieved a 50 per cent growth rate in tourism development, the largest in the world. Egypt recorded the largest individual growth almost 11.8 per cent. However, there has been an attempt by Egypt to encourage transit passengers to different destinations to pay a short visit to the country. "The potential volume is great and it could be beneficial for both parties," said Gad.

Rayan explained that most of Egypt's transit traffic was due to EgyptAir's worldwide network. "It is our job to promote traffic, not tourism. And it is impossible to convince a traveller to stop over in Cairo unless he is entitled to do so," he said.

Rayan suggested that tourists be given "appetisers", or an incentive to stop over in Egypt as part of their journey. He

used South Africa as an example. An EgyptAir-associated travel office is promoting Egypt to tourists from South Africa.

"We tell them that two days are all that's needed to visit the main attractions in Cairo — the Pyramids, the Islamic monuments and museums, etc.," he said. Rayan claims that he was the first to invite tourists from South Africa to stay in Egypt en route to other destinations even before diplomatic relations between the two countries were resumed. First, EgyptAir carried South African pilgrims to Saudi Arabia and on their return, they were encouraged to stop over in Cairo. "Later we managed to entice tourists to Egypt as their primary destination. Now we have four flights to South Africa a week," Rayan said.

He boasted that EgyptAir is increasing the number of non-stop flights to different parts of the world. "Frequent departures is the most economical way to run an airline. Besides, businessmen, who make up a large sector of travellers, prefer non-stop flights," he said. EgyptAir now has five non-stop flights to New York per week.

Discussions, already heated, took another turn when it came to tourism promotion. Geoffry Gray-Forton, chairman of Meetings World Association, declared that none of Egypt's promotional offices in New York, London, Paris or Frankfurt could give any information on the IATM event. "Some tried to extract the information from EgyptAir but got no answer," Gray-Forton said. Under-secretary Gad claimed that Egypt's offices abroad had issued press releases to inform tour operators about the event. "A local employee who did not know about it might have answered the phone but major officials certainly knew about the event," she assured.

Mohamed Nessim, owner of a major tourism company and former chairman of ETA, complained that there are no joint efforts to promote tourism to the region. "It is true that Egypt has come a long way in this field but coordinated efforts will certainly bring in more benefits," Nessim said. He believes it is a question of exploiting the existing potential in the area. "The area is rich in history, culture, beaches, deserts, oases and comparatively cheap services. Compared with what we have to offer, we're still getting very little," he said.

EGYPTAIR

Telephone numbers of EGYPT AIR offices in governorates:

Abu Simbel Sales Office:	324363-324735
Alexandria Offices: Ram:	423337-423778
Gleem:	5865461-5865434
Airport Office:	4218464-422788-422837-4219193
Aswan Office:	3150001-1/2/3/4
Airport Office:	40337-404563
Assuit Office:	323151-322711-324000-324907
Mansura Office:	363978-363733
Hurghada Office:	4435914
Airport Office:	442883-443597
Komelia Office:	328937-221954-221951/2-328936
Luxor Office:	3685678/1/2/3/4
Airport Office:	3685678/78
Luxor Office Karnak:	362360
Marsa Matruh Office:	934398
Menoufia Office (Shebin El Kom):	233392-233573-233522
New Valley Office:	089/901695
Port Said Office:	224129-222874-220921
Port Said Office Karnak:	238833-239976
Sharm El Sheikh Office:	690314-690409
Airport Office:	690408
Taba Office:	069/330410-330011
Direc:	5783628
Tanta Office:	311750311709
Zakzuk Office:	349828-3498301

مكتبة من الأصل

Baited breath

Former national team member Haithem Farouk is one of a growing number of Egyptian footballers to turn professional abroad. The athlete awaits a call to return home to play on the national team once again, reports Ragil Hallim

At the time of Haithem Farouk's decision to play for the Netherlands' Feyenoord team the consensus among Egyptian football aficionados was that while he had displayed talent during his tenure at Olympic of Alexandria, he was not professional material.

The naysayers had right on their side, for although the athlete's name had briefly appeared on the national team's roster, his abilities were questioned after he failed to distinguish himself on the field. Still worse, following their acrimonious split over Farouk's decision to leave the club, Olympic coach Farouk Gaafer went on record saying that Farouk was an amateur who had only participated in friendlies and was as yet untested in official matches.

The news from the Netherlands, however, despite his home critics, is that Farouk is displaying all the right stuff and has become one of the key players to a Feyenoord victory in the Dutch league.

A word of Farouk's triumph began reaching his native soil the Egyptian national team's technical staff, including both Gaafer and former football star Mahmoud El-Khatib, gave thought to adding the player to the national squad. But, as the adage goes, seeing is believing and so El-Khatib booked a flight to Holland to assess the athlete in a report for the Egyptian Football Federation. The federation is expected to tender a response concerning the future of the athlete with the national team imminently.

Farouk recently spoke to *Al-Ahram Weekly* about his life as a professional football player and his ambitions for the future. "I never dreamt of turning pro in one of the leading countries in football, such as the Netherlands," explained Farouk. "I am intoxicated with the experience because the game is very popular in Holland and the matches are very tough. I hope to distinguish myself in the club and prove that Egypt can provide top players."

Farouk began his football career with Olympic Club at the age of 14. In a career highlight the athlete was chosen to represent Egypt on the national team for the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona. A year later his short-lived tenure with the Egyptian national team began and ended.

Haithem Farouk giving away autographs

Farouk's first flirtation with the Feyenoord team came about in 1993 when he met former coach Jack Swart, while on a visit to his uncle's home in the Netherlands. It was then that the athlete made the critical decision to attempt a professional career. After a spell training at the Ajax Club under the wing of former Egyptian national team coach Rund Kroll, but having little luck landing a permanent berth at one of the clubs, Farouk went home.

"I returned to Egypt, but then left again in September 1995," Farouk explained. "Around that time I was introduced to Nol du Raouer who was training the Amstrik Club. But because of its low budget, the club couldn't afford a new defender." Farouk added.

The future began to look more promising when Yugoslav born Mick Samardic introduced Farouk to officials at Excelsior Club. Negotiations were well under way when Olympic Club raised objections.

"Unfortunately Olympic Club refused to release me and attempted to stifle my chances by claiming that I was an amateur," Farouk explained. "It turned out to be a blessing because when I contacted FIFA, its officials told me that being an amateur afforded me the privilege of moving to any club I wished without the approval of my local club."

Despite the protracted negotiations and the advice of FIFA, the negotiations with Excelsior club fell through. Farouk's big break followed soon after when he signed with the Feyenoord Club. The footballer quickly found that while the name of the game is the same, the play in the two countries is completely different.

"In Egypt we depend mainly on defense, whereas here in the Netherlands the play is open," Farouk explained. "That is why the games are always thrilling."

Farouk estimates that his level of play has improved by nearly 30 per cent since his arrival in the Netherlands and he is anxiously awaiting the final outcome of El-Khatib's assessment. Until then, Farouk, along with Egyptian football fans, will have to await his summons for a place on the national team. "As hard as it is I will wait with patience until I am called to my real place," said Farouk.



Sfaxien of Tunisia were aggressive but Zamalek managed to take control of the field

photo: Mohamed Wassim

A renaissance of sports

Zamalek and Arab Contractors dual wins cheered soccer fans this weekend during qualifications for the finals of the African Champions' and Cup Winners cups. The Contractors are poised to seize the trophy for the first time in 14 years reports Inas Mazhar

Zamalek displayed ovens of steel on Sunday as they squeezed into their fourth African Champions Cup final in 12 years. The Egyptian team converted an early spot kick to defeat Sfaxien of Tunisia 1-0 in Alexandria and forced a penalty shoot-out where their greater accuracy proved decisive.

A first-leg encounter between Tunisia's Sfaxien and Zamalek, played in Tunis two weeks ago, ended with the same 1-0 result in the Tunisian's favour and ensured an all-out battle for the final berth. Zamalek substitute goalkeeper Nader El-Sayed, who succeeded in saving two kicks, helped secure the Egyptian team's 4-3 qualification to the final.

Zamalek's win in the gripping North African showdown was produced despite the absence of suspended defender Nabil Mahmoud and midfielder Ahmed El-Kass.

The Tunisians travelled to Egypt with a dismal away record and fell behind after just 19 minutes of play. Sfaxien rarely abandoned their defensive shell, even in the second half, and Zamalek goalkeeper Hussein El-Sayed was largely consigned to the role of spectator.

Zamalek, banned by the African Football Federation from playing at home in the Cairo Stadium following fan riots a few months ago, is scheduled to play a first-leg match against Shooting Stars of Nigeria next month in an away game. The second will be held in Egypt. Shooting Stars edged into the final with a 1-0 triumph over JS Kabylie of Algeria before a capacity 50,000 crowd in Ibadan.

Arab Contractors in parallel action completed a memorable day for Egypt by reaching their 3rd Cup Winners Cup final by drawing 1-1 against the once-mighty Canon Yaounde of Cameroon. The draw pits the Contractors against Sodigraf of Zaire and has revived the team's hopes of regaining the cup trophy for the first time in 14 years.

Watched by 40,000 spectators under the heavy rain in Cameroon, the Contractors established a one-goal lead after 61 minutes when Abdel-Satar Sabri struck a hard woo goal.

The Canon-Contractors home match was played in Cairo a fortnight ago and ended with a 2-1 victory for the Egyptian team. Canon, forcing 14 corners in the first half without unduly troubling goalkeeper Ahmed Saber, equalised two minutes before the final whistle when Jupiter Ngangai converted a penalty.

In an highly anticipated encounter Sodigraf and Arab Contractors are to meet for the first-leg match in Cairo next month.

'I'll be back'

The brilliant career of Nigeria's 20-year-old Olympic hero, Nwankwo Kanu is on hold following the discovery of a life-threatening heart condition. Abeer Anwar reports

Nwankwo Kanu, the 20-year-old star of Nigerian football star has been diagnosed with a heart valve defect on the eve of his season debut with Italy's Internazionale Club. The condition was discovered during routine fitness tests conducted on all players prior to the start of the season and it is speculation that the condition may end what, by all appearances, promised to be a stellar career.

Kanu, who began his professional career with Ajax, left the club after a two-year stint, to play for Internazionale last July for a reported 600,000 sterling a-year contract. He had played in four friendly pre-season matches before he was given the tragic news of the heart ailment that may end his short but illustrious career.

In fact, statements from Kanu's former club Amsterdam's Ajax stand in direct contrast to those given by the team of doctors called by Internazionale. Ajax treasurer, Arie Van Os went on record as saying that his club's medical check-ups had never discovered anything amiss with Kanu's health.

But Bruno Caru, one of the three heart specialists who have studied the Kanu case, expressed dismay that the condition was not detected earlier. "I am surprised that Kanu has been able to play for so many years in Holland and during the recent Olympics without any complaints. He

might have died at any second". Dr Caru explained that the nature of the heart malady precluded any course of treatment other than surgery. The Olympian will have to undergo an operation to replace his aortic valve in an attempt to alleviate his condition.

Kanu, who began his professional career with Ajax, left the club after a two-year stint, to play for Internazionale last July for a reported 600,000 sterling a-year contract. He had played in four friendly pre-season matches before he was given the tragic news of the heart ailment that may end his short but illustrious career.

Kanu, with the characteristic determination that has propelled him thus far, steadfastly refuses to accept the possibility of an end to his football playing days.

"It's hard to describe the nightmare I am going through, but I don't believe everything is finished. I will go to the best specialists in the world in order to play again. I just can't imagine giving up soccer," commented Piero Volpi, Internazionale's team doctor.

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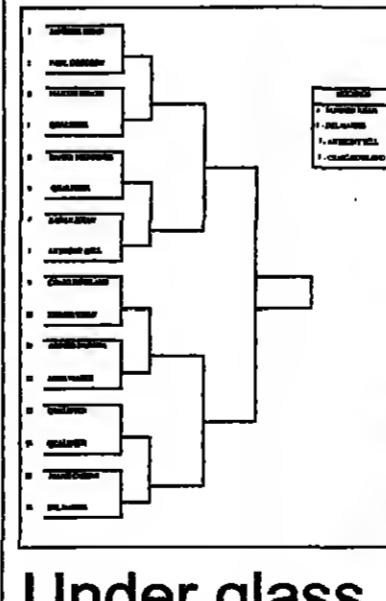
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a 1993 World Junior Cup winner. The talented footballer helped Ajax Amsterdam win two Dutch league titles and one World Club Cup after signing on in 1994. Kanu proved his mettle as a substitute on Ajax's 1995 Champions Cup winning team and scored two brilliant goals against Brazil in the recent Olympic semi-finals to steer Nigeria to a memorable 4-3 victory.

Subsequent to his diagnosis by an Italian heart specialist, Kanu flew to the London-based practice of Egyptian cardiologist Dr Magdi Yaqoub for a second opinion. Dr Yaqoub confirmed his condition but was able to give assurances of a promising future.

"Kanu will have to undergo surgery and bearing any complications will be able to return to the playing field," explained Yaqoub. The opinion was seconded by another cardiologist residing in America who believes that Kanu will be playing football within six months of surgery.

The football hero recently celebrated his 20th birthday in style, collecting a gold medal in the wake of Nigeria's historic defeat of Argentina in the Atlanta Olympics. Kanu's age belies the catalogue of achievements he has amassed since he was



Under glass

IN A World Squash Professional Association (WSPA) first, the ballot of the main draw of an association sponsored event took place outside its headquarters in Wales. Mohamed El-Menshawi, head organiser of the 4th Helipolis Squash Open after petitioning WSPA officials, was given the go ahead to stage the draw in Egypt.

"This will certainly raise publicity for the Helipolis Open and promote it to the stature of other championships in Egypt such as Al-Ahram, and the Gezira tournaments," commented El-Menshawi.

The tournament got underway last Monday in the portable glass court first erected at the Al-Ahram Squash Open at the Giza Pyramids.

The draw, attended by official WSPA presenter Robert Edward,



Ahmed Barada facing Amir Wagih for the sixth time in the Helipolis Open

contained 16 entries including Egypt's Amir Wagih and Ahmed Barada. The two friendly rivals were dismayed to discover that they will be playing against each other in the first-round of the main draw.

WPSA sponsored judges, John Robinson and Bert Marton will be joined by supervising judge Abdel-Hamid Arif in overseeing the distribution of the \$35,000 prize pool among the top 16 competitors.

Edited by Inas Mazhar

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**Sonallah
Ibrahim:**

Ciffhanging

A life stranger than fiction? Just one deep breath...

In his first, largely autobiographical novel, *Tilk Al-Raiha (The Smell of It)*, Sonallah Ibrahim draws a self-portrait. The accessibility of the portrait, however, was largely determined by censorship. Certain "immoral" passages were censored before publication; indeed *The Smell of It* was banned in 1966. The second edition, of 1969, was "expurgated" of phrases and scenes that the political and literary establishment deemed unacceptable. It was to be twenty years before a Moroccan edition made the novel accessible in its entirety.

In *The Smell of It*, as in his later works, Ibrahim deliberately breached political and moral taboos, revealing without shame all the motives and desires society would have him suppress. He addresses the social and political dimensions of Egyptian reality past and present, but from a unique perspective, that of an experience formulated by years of political activism: imprisonment, self-imposed exile and suffering. Merging Freudianism with Marxism, Ibrahim produces his own vision of both — all his "isms", indeed, are homespun.

Ibrahim's political involvement began when he became a member of a leftist organisation. Eluding the police, he devoted himself to underground work in the Delta countryside. After a short lull, in 1956, he started writing and translating with a brilliant intellect,

one of the leading figures of the communist movement in Egypt, Shohdi Atiya. The latter had just been released after seven years in prison and had been allowed to establish a small publishing office. But in January 1959 came the crackdown on the left.

Ibrahim and Atiya found themselves constantly on the move from one prison to another — from the Citadel prison to Kharga Oasis prison, from Cairo to Alexandria. There they were given a military trial, then taken to Abu Za'bal prison, where a barbed wire fence awaited them. Ibrahim was handicapped at Atiya. The two men were tortured.

In *The Smell of It*, Ibrahim remembered:

"I was sitting beside him, my hand manacled to his. We were at the back of the lorry and the other lorries were behind us. He knew what was going to happen, but he did not say anything... When we arrived it was dawn. They drove us out of the lorry with sticks. We sat on the ground. We were shivering with the cold and fear. He was the tallest one of us. I heard someone say: 'That is him,' and they struck him on the head and said: 'Lower your head, you dog.' They began calling out our names. Then they called his, and that was the last time I saw him."

Ibrahim remained in detention for five years, most of which were spent in Kharga Oasis prison. The inmates included a number of outstanding critics and

writers like Alfred Farag, Salah Hafez, Ibrahim Abd-el-Halim, Mahmoud El-Alem, Abdel-Aziz Anis and Mohamed Siddi. Ibrahim was closest to a smaller circle of young writers like Abdel-Hakim Qassim who later achieved recognition with his novel *Ayam Al-Inan Al-Sabaa (The Seven Days of Man)*. Raouf Moqdad who wrote *Baydat Al-Naama (Ostrich Egg)* and Kamel El-Qalish, the author of *Sadmat Ta'ir Ghrib (The Shock of an Alien Bird)*. The handful of short stories Ibrahim wrote at the time were published after his release, in *Al-Gomhouria* newspaper.

Ibrahim belonged to a political group that backed Nasser's socialism and nurtured rosy illusions about reality. But in *The Smell of It*, it was to his own living experience that Ibrahim turned. The web of relations he delineates are set against a society beginning to succumb to consumer values, the body of a construction worker who has fallen from a building is left indifferent covered with newspapers, a boy is casually, brutally raped in a police station, ties of good-will and mutual support are severed between friends and colleagues. *The Smell of It* is hardly a flower-scented whiff of progress and development. It reeks of overflowing sewage, oppression, indifference and decadence.

The integrity of Ibrahim's portraiture in the novel was misunderstood: some took him to be antagonistic to the Naserrite experience and he was identified in certain critical essays as an enemy of "Naserrite totalitarianism". But Ibrahim has always been free of the idealistic falsifications of reality, although he supported the regime's semi-imperialist drive as well as its pro-Arabism and commitment to social reform. In Ibrahim's view, it is the writer's task to uphold a critical sceptical stance towards power — he it political, economic or ideological. According to Ibrahim, the writer's role is to search continually for the new, and to remain in perpetual rebellion against all that is obsolete and redundant.

Likewise, there is no trace of heroism in Ibrahim's autobiographical description of imprisonment, torture, his integrity and unending commitment to principles. All these aspects of his personality and experience are represented as part of ordinary daily life, an innate way of living and thinking. To him, politics is inseparable from the quotidian, from the subconscious. And even, in his subsequent novels *Nigmat Aghram (August Star)* and *Betrit, Betrit*, politics is interwoven with the pro-

tagonists' consciousness, their vital energy, informing their choice of friends and even their response to women.

Ibrahim's fiction is matter-of-fact about sex, but his treatment of the subject has its own distinctive features. The straightforward descriptions of the body and its functions reflect Ibrahim's disdain of the eccllesiastic view that separates human nature into the soul, fluttering in the upper spheres, versus the body, ruled by disorderly, base passions.

Ibrahim's view embraces human nature in its totality, treating the language of the body with dignity. Beyond raw biology, relationships reflect patterns of domination and submission. Sex is read as an expression of the culturally determined difference between men and women. In Ibrahim's fiction, sex is not steeped in sin, nor is the desired woman ever reduced to an object without will or autonomy. The masculine self-image is also intimately related to social relationships and class issues. To Sonallah, then, sex interfaces with politics, and he focuses on this interrelationship.

If Ibrahim's portrayal of sexual acts is rendered with impetuosity, his courageous breaking of taboo is premised on an understanding that self-knowledge is to be attained through intimate relationships. Ibrahim charts, beyond eroticism, the impulse to break isolation. At no point, however, does he indulge in sentimentalism and romanticism — in both sex and politics, he dreams with wide-open eyes. He is explicit but never vulgar; his accounts of experiences that would rouse titters in bourgeois drawing rooms, or outrage among the more ascetic are rendered with sympathy and irony. Masturbation becomes an attempt to embrace illusion, the inability to interact with reality, in sex or politics. In Ibrahim's fiction, the ugliness of political reality, which subjects citizens to the most vicious forms of torture is mirrored in sexual acts or physiological functions generally considered too risqué or too distasteful for print. But Ibrahim sees in the representation of ugliness a certain beauty, and a literary sensibility unlike the dominant one.

Ibrahim's writing has strongly influenced the work of the '90s generation. Eclectic like him, they rebel against literary conventions and rhetorical devices, turn in to the concrete details of daily life, glory in the corporeal and sexual and uphold the supremacy of individual experience. While the '90s writers differ from Ibrahim in their total disregard for political and social issues, he follows with interest the output of these writers, not unduly disturbed by the more off-beat texts some of them produce. He says they remind him of the '60s generation in their rebellion against the establishment. "The writers of the '60s," he hastens to add, "far from referring to a school with distinctive features, is an umbrella term for disparate experiments — from Gamal El-Ghitani's novels, inspired by medieval historians, or Mohammed El-Baziz's fictional world of myth and archetype, to the realism of Youssef El-Quid."

The '90s writers, on the other hand, have more in common with each other than the desire to create a rupture with the past. In his view, the most promising among them are bound to mature beyond the focus on literary experiments and start posing questions about what they write and whom they address. Through the quidnunc they will come to grips with the political, reading an ice-cream cone the name of the multinational company that presents one of the faces of hegemony. Some of these writers, he asserts, are already starting to walk out of the dead-end street of in-

difference to stand at the edge of the ditch and take a good look.

As for Ibrahim, he has maintained a critical stance toward politics, particularly the variations practiced by the progressive Arab parties which remain abstractions, floating on the surface of daily life. Members of such parties are past masters at reiterating progressive slogans that, however, have no bearing on their relationships at work or at home, with their wives and children, or in their consumer lifestyles. He mentions that some parties often develop into a subsidiary establishment within the regime playing, at best, the role of a pressure group.

Ibrahim has no involvement with any parties or with establishment institutions. Indeed, he has no regular job but leads the lifestyle of a professional writer, working from home and subjected to the usual shortcomings of the publishing industry. But he has achieved literary renown. Many of his novels have been translated into various languages and received much critical acclaim and academic attention abroad.

In addition to writing science fiction for children about oceanography, bumble bees and spiders, he is an accomplished and original translator, his most recent work an anthology of women writers' erotica. Although the positive reception of his writings has brought him much fulfillment, he is aware that his work is often misunderstood. Some foreign readers saw in his novel *Zat (Self)* nothing more than an accomplished satire on contemporary Egypt and Egyptians. Similarly, many Lebanese readers were impressed by his novel *Beirut, Beirut* which they read as a personal attack, overlooking the author's criticism of the situation in the Arab world at large.

Although travel has given him much insight and experience, he is always reluctant to leave home. There was his 1968 trip to Lebanon on the deck of a ship; later he was to work at a news agency in Germany; then he studied film in Moscow for three years. He then returned to Egypt where he has lived since 1974 apart from brief trips to attend conferences and cultural symposia. On these trips he is questioned, perhaps too eagerly, about Arabs, Islamist terrorism, and normalization with Israel. This kind of situation, in his view, is caused by the non-disinterested sponsorship of many cultural events by banks, firms, and political organisations. There are Arab public relation stars, he notes, who act as brokers for these interests.

Looking back, Ibrahim muses about the massive changes that have overtaken the cultural scene. Some thinkers who started out as radicals were assimilated by the establishment, reemerging as hard-line right-wingers. Shallow commercial notions about the role of writers, intellectuals, and the function of literature have gained currency — it is the culture of petro-dollars. Ibrahim, however, is optimistic about new generations who look inward, driving into their own expeditions in search of solutions to the current impasse.

He perseveres in his search; he emphasizes about the theme of the quest in contemporary fiction. In his own work, he observes, he often draws on the techniques of that most popular of genres, the detective novel: the emphasis on action and breath-taking suspense. He sees the current state of affairs in the Arab region, the Gulf War and the role of Israel as more melodramatic than the most contrived of fiction at cliffhangers — a state of affairs that calls for X-marks-the-spot techniques to cut away the mystery.

Profile by Ibrahim Fathi

Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostris



As of October 27, Cairo and Zurich have more in common than five Swissair flights a week. Namely six. Plus a lot of fast European connections. No hub beats Zurich's transit: usually less than 45 minutes, same terminal. So if you take off early in Cairo, you can be in the City of London, Brussels or Munich, for instance, before everyone gets back from lunch. Talking about getting back: if you'd like to save time, go nonstop via Zurich again.

Swissair world's most refreshing airline.

 Restaurant - Dancing Bar <i>The best in town</i>	For reservation contact : 345 99 39 302 99 10 197, 26 July st. Mohandessin before sphinx square
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Peace
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Cable to Bi

PRESIDENT Hosni Mubarak sent a cable to President Bill Clinton, gratulating him on his election for a second term in the White House. Foreign Minister Amr Moussa went on to express hope that the US will play a more active role in Middle East peace making following the election of President Clinton.

"We hope and we are confident that Egypt-American cooperation will gain in strength so that the movement toward a just peace will be consolidated."

In control

RUSSIAN leader Yeltsin reclaimed his presidential powers and control of the nuclear button 24 hours after delegating them to Prime Minister Chernomyrdin.

Kremlin announced yesterday that Chernomyrdin, who had been rapidly promoted to prime minister, had been dismissed during a quidnunc meeting yesterday. Chernomyrdin had told reporters that he would soon return to work. DeBailey, who oversaw the operation, said five passes were performed during the seven-hour surgery Tuesday and she should fully recover in six to eight weeks.

مكتبة من الأصل